

How-To: Basic Empathy Circle

Empathy Circle is different from a normal conversation. And it usually requires you to experience it to notice its strengths. There is a simple structure and a set of values we share. We may feel limited at first but it is ultimately very freeing.

In a Circle of 4 to 5 Participants

- ✧ the first person selects who they will speak to.
- ✧ they speak about whatever comes up for them for a set time (typically 3-5 min).
- ✧ the listener reflects back what they are hearing until the speaker feels heard to their satisfaction.
- ✧ then it is the listener's turn to select who they will speak to and for that new listener to reflect back on what they are hearing.
- ✧ everyone helps hold the circle process by monitoring and sticking to the steps. The dialog continues around the circle like this for the time allotted.

Speaker

- ✧ Select who will listen to you. Good to spread is around to include everyone. But it's your choice.
- ✧ Pause often to give the listener a chance to reflect on what they heard. Check if they understood you to your satisfaction. If not say it again, maybe in different words. until you feel understood.
- ✧ When you are done talking and you feel heard, you can say "I'm fully heard" to indicate that you are done with your turn.

Active Listener

- ✧ You may ask the speaker to pause periodically so you can reflect on what you heard.
- ✧ In your own words reflect back the essence of what you hear the speaker saying.
- ✧ Refrain from asking questions, judging, analyzing, detaching, diagnosing, advising, or sympathizing. When it's your turn to speak, you can say anything you want.

Silent Listeners

- ✧ Listen and be present to the exchange between the speaker and active listener. You will soon have a turn to actively listen and speak.

The group may choose a particular topic or issue to discuss, however, every participant may talk about whatever s/he wants to share with the group and be heard.



Bridging political divides - what Empathy Circle is not

- ✧ is not accepting the view or political attitude of your opponent BUT is making the first step to not-exclude him/her from the community/society we (as well as them) want to create
- ✧ is not a simple agreement with your opponent BUT an attempt to understand his/her motivations, reasons, causes, purposes
- ✧ is not compromising nor jeopardizing your goals or values BUT is creating the space for looking for the solution.

Empathy by Carl Rogers (1974)

It is not a state but the process of empathy. The way of being with another person which is termed empathic has several facets:

1. It means entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it.
2. It involves being sensitive moment to moment to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion or whatever that he or she is experiencing.
3. It means temporarily living in his/her life moving about in it delicately without making judgments, sensing meanings of which s/he is scarcely aware but not trying to uncover feelings of which s/he is totally unaware since this would be too threatening.
4. It includes communicating you are sensing of her/his world as you look with fresh and unfrightened eyes at elements of which s/he is fearful.
5. It means frequently checking with her/him as to the accuracy of your sensing and being guided by her/his responses.
6. You are a confident companion to him/her in her/his world by pointing to the possible meanings in the flow of his/her experiencing.
7. You help him/her to focus on this useful type of referent (relatum) to experience his/her meanings fully and move forward in his/her experiencing.
8. Being with another in this way means that for the time being you lay aside the views and values that you hold for yourself in order to enter her/his world without prejudice.
9. In some sense, it means that you lay aside yourself and this can be done only by a person who is secure enough in her/himself that s/he knows s/he will not get lost in what may turn out to be the strange or bizarre world of the other and can comfortably return to his own world when s/he wishes.

Being empathic is a complex demanding strong yet subtle and gentle way of being.

For Carl Rogers, there are three important values of a culture of empathy: Empathy, Positive Regard and Self-integrity.

