



Empathy in Action- By Hepzibah Sharmila,  
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**EMPATHY**

**IN ACTION**

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## Purpose:

Create impact — for ourselves, our relationships, our communities."

## Pre-Talk Reflections :

Learning ≠ Becoming – We can know about empathy without living it.

Empathy is felt, practiced, lived.

Reflection matters: Slowing down strengthens connection and emotional health.

Honest Acknowledgment: Growth is ongoing; rough edges remain.

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“We all think we know it... but do we?”



Understanding a person from **their frame of reference**, not just your own. (APA)

The ability to **sense emotions + imagine another's thoughts/feelings**. (Greater Good Science Center)

Emotionally **understanding & connecting with others**. (Verywell Mind)

Recognize, understand, and **share thoughts & feelings**. (Psychology Today)

Understand, **be sensitive to, and vicariously experience another's feelings**. (Merriam-Webster)

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# Empathy is Multidimensional

*Research View (Zurek & Scheithauer, 2017):*

## 1. Cognitive Empathy – The Mind of Empathy

Understand another,s thoughts & perspective

*“I can see why you might feel that way.”*

## 2. Emotional (Affective) Empathy – The Heart of Empathy

Feel with another,s emotions

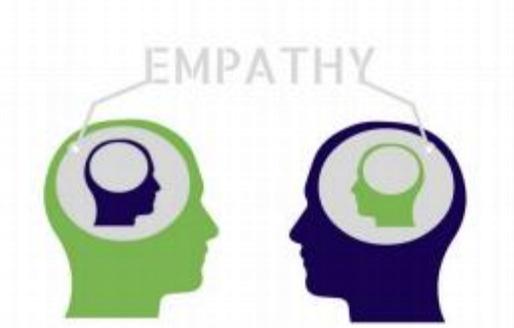
*“I feel your sadness when you speak.”*

## 3. Compassionate Empathy – The Hands of Empathy

Act with care & understanding

*“I want to help in some way.”*

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### Three Types of Empathy

Cognitive  
Empathy



Desire to  
Understand

Emotional  
Empathy



Desire to  
Feel

Compassionate  
Empathy



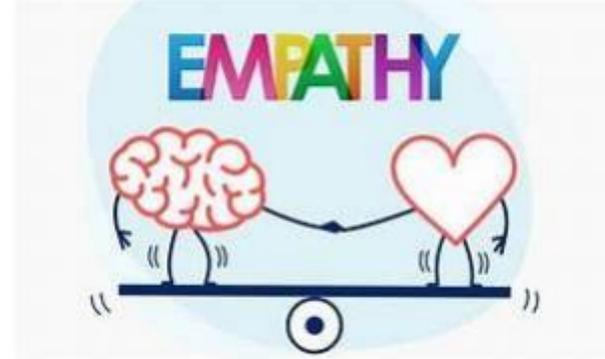
Desire to Help &  
Support

A colleague became **defensive during feedback**, initially seen as resistant or arrogant.

Leader addressed the situation **gently, clarifying** feedback was about growth, not judgment.

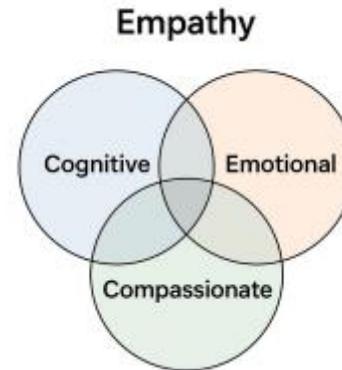
Colleague **relaxed** and expressed feeling attacked in reviews.

Outcome: Empathizing with the emotion beneath the behavior **turned resistance into openness**.



### Looking at the three layers:

- The **recognition of what might be going on underneath** — *Cognitive Empathy*
- The **connection to his anxiety and fear of judgment** — *Emotional Empathy*
- The **intentional reassurance and supportive framing** — *Compassionate Empathy*



“Which form of empathy comes most naturally to you — and which feels harder?”

## Mini Reflection



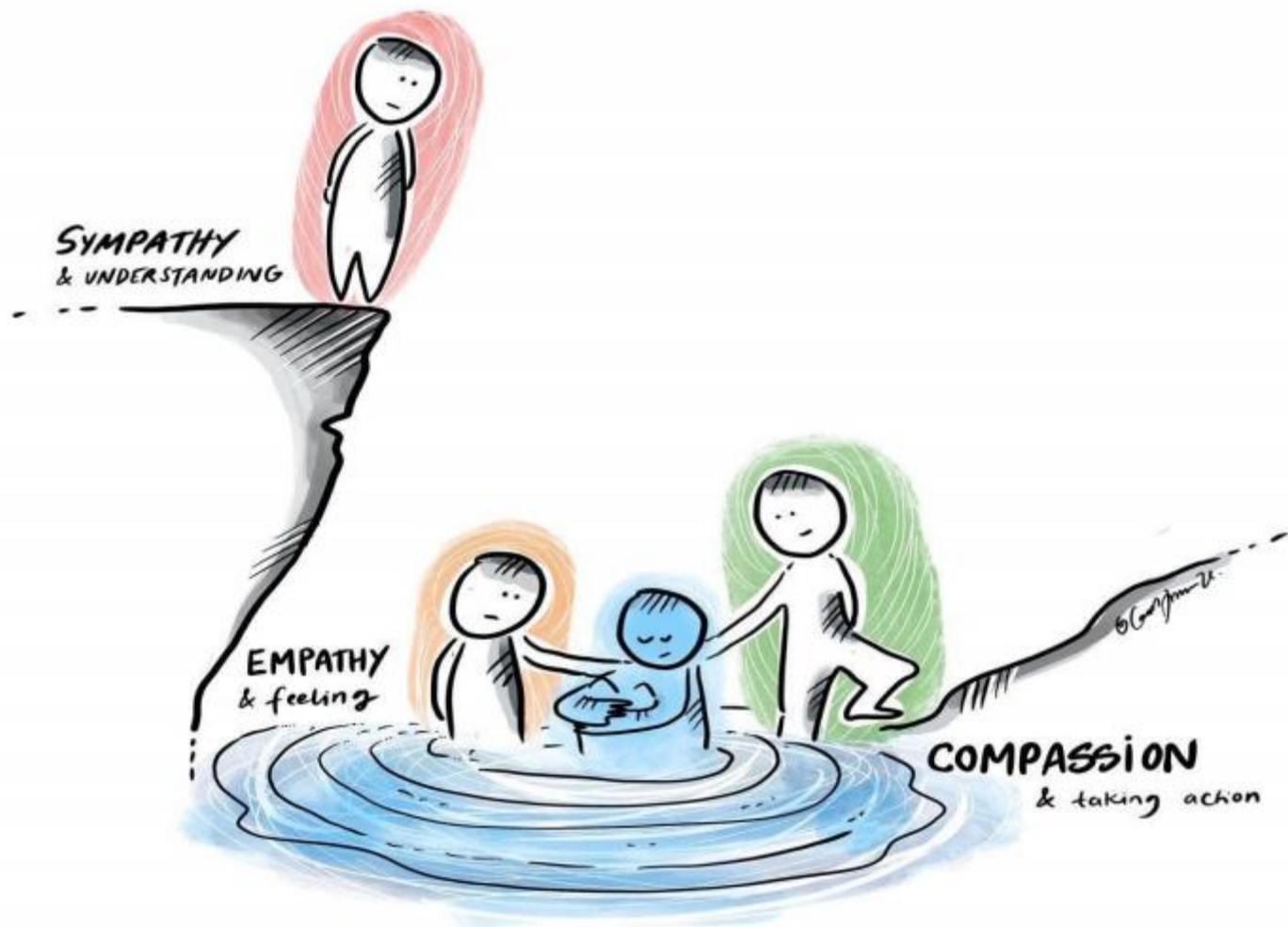
**Think** of a recent situation where someone shared something difficult with you.

**Ask yourself:** Did you understand, feel, or act differently?

**Which form** of empathy came naturally?

Which was **harder**?

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**SYMPATHY**  
& UNDERSTANDING

**EMPATHY**  
& feeling

**COMPASSION**  
& taking action

© Gerd Jansen 2011

“Empathy is not... — and knowing this is as important as learning what it is.”

## Empathy is NOT Sympathy

Sympathy comforts *from the outside*; empathy connects *from within*.

Sympathy can unintentionally make people feel pitied; empathy makes them feel *understood*.

Sympathy ends the conversation; empathy opens it.



**EMPATHY**

- 1 Active
- 2 Understanding someone's feelings as if they were yours
- 3 Getting to the root of the problem, offering comfort

An illustration of two people sitting on the floor, hunched over with their heads buried in their arms, appearing sad or distressed. The person on the left is wearing a black shirt and dark pants, and the person on the right is wearing a yellow shirt and blue pants. In the top right corner of this section, there is a small logo for 'The Medic Portal'.

**VS**

**SYMPATHY**

- 1 Passive
- 2 Feeling sorry for someone from your own point of view
- 3 Offering unsolicited advice and passing judgement

## 2 Empathy is NOT Agreement

Agreement validates the choice; empathy validates the *feeling*.

Agreement can blur boundaries; empathy strengthens trust.

Empathy helps people feel safe enough to reflect — and maybe even change.





## 4□ Empathy is NOT Automatic or Effortless

Empathy competes with speed — it thrives on slowness.

It requires emotional literacy: naming feelings, noticing tone, reading cues.

It's easier with some people, harder with others — and that's okay.



It's an *intentional practice* of staying connected, curious, and compassionate — even when it's uncomfortable.

FindingTimeToFly.com 

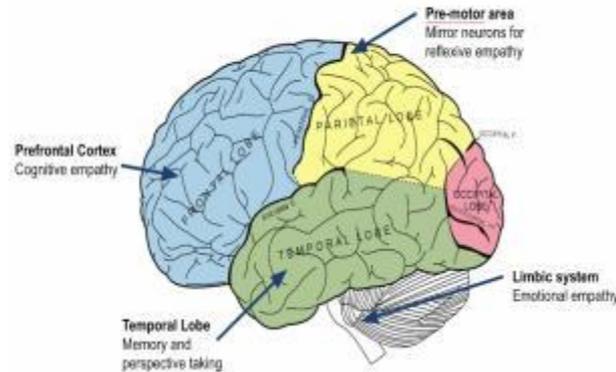
# Why Empathy Matters in Relationships

**Builds trust and cooperation:** *"When people feel understood, they open up more. Think about it — when someone really listens to you, doesn't it make it easier to be honest?"*

**Improves communication:** *"Empathy isn't just hearing words; it's listening to what's behind them. Ever had a conversation where you knew the person just got you? That's empathy at work."*

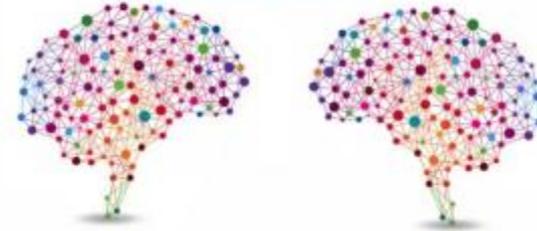
**Heals conflict:** *"Disagreements are normal, right? But empathy acts like a bridge — it helps people feel heard rather than creating distance."*

**Boosts emotional intelligence & resilience:** *"When we recognize others' emotions and respond thoughtfully, we also strengthen our own awareness and flexibility. Makes challenging situations easier to navigate."*

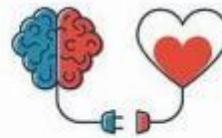


## Mirror neurons

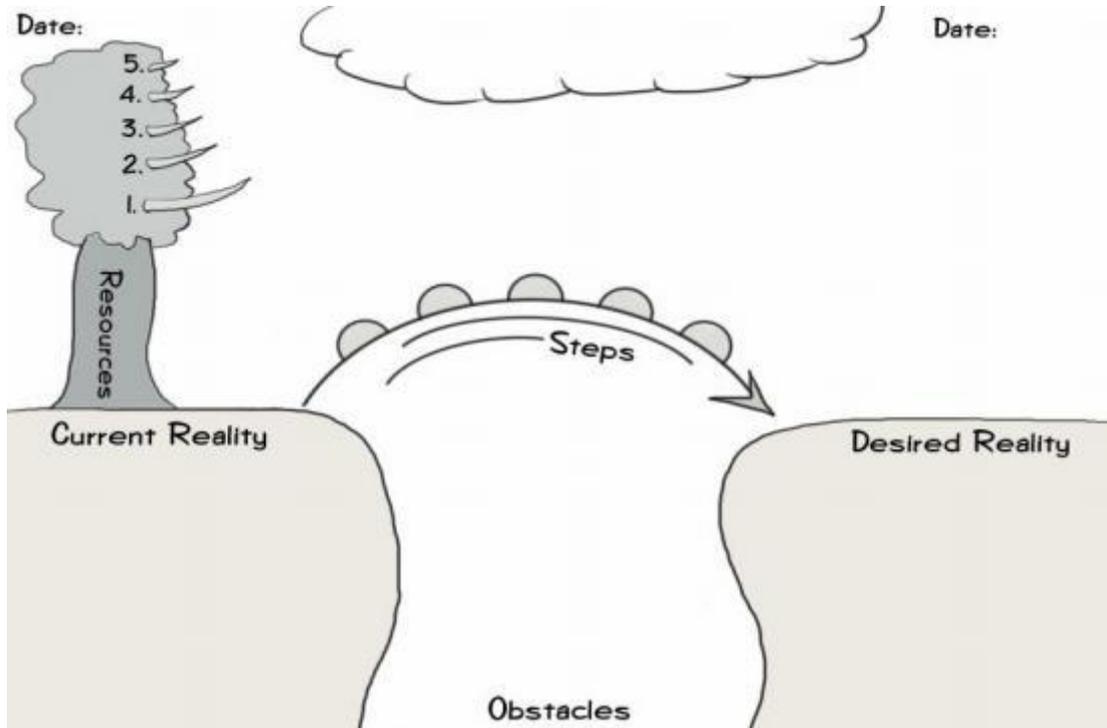
One Clear Message 🗣️



## Emotional Intelligence



**BUILD TRUST**



**Reflection** "Think about one thing you might try in the next few days to show more empathy — even something tiny. Hold that thought — we'll come back to it in the next section. "

# EMPATHY IN CONFLICT



## CONFLICTS

1 **Opening**: “We’ve seen how empathy builds understanding and connection — but it’s never more powerful than when there’s conflict.” “Conflict is not a bad thing — it’s a natural sign that we care about something. The real question is: how do we handle it?”

## 2 What happens when empathy is missing

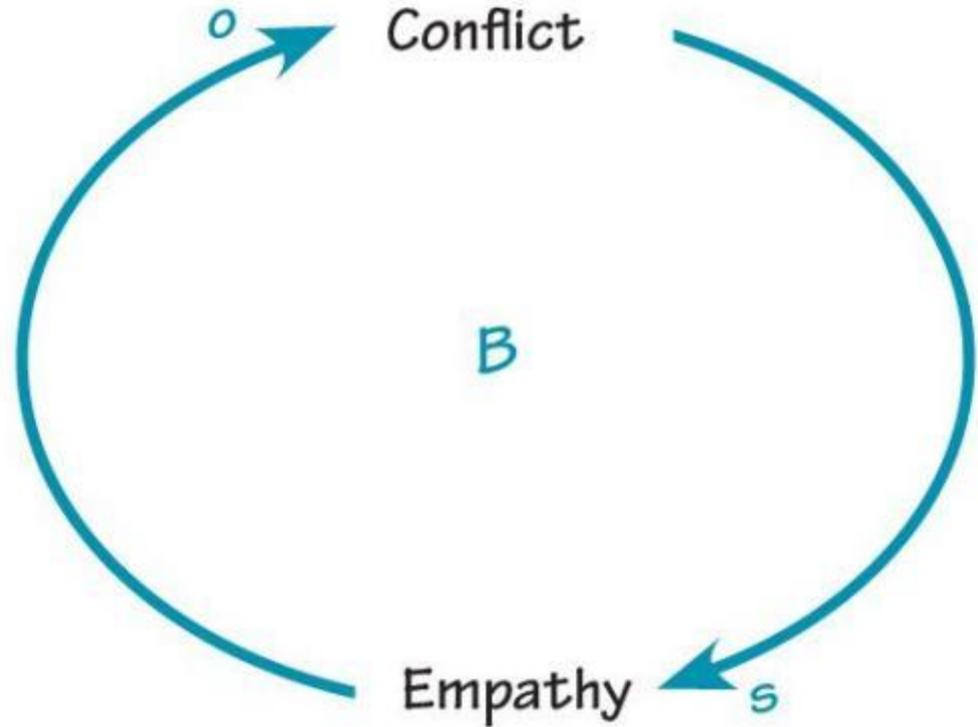
*“When empathy goes missing in a disagreement, three things usually happen.”*

*“First, **defensiveness** — we stop listening and start protecting our position.”*

*“Second, **distance** — people withdraw, shutdown, or walk away emotionally.”*

*“And third, **distortion** — we misread the other person’s intent and assume the worst.”*

*“That’s when a small spark becomes a*



### 3 How empathy changes the equation

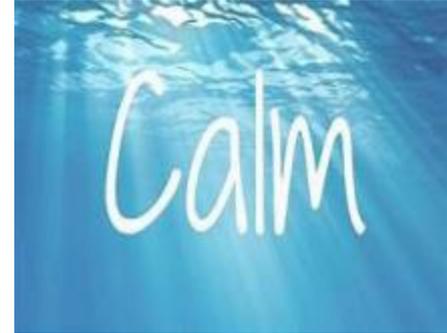
*“threat” → “calm” → “connect.”*

*“Empathy doesn’t erase the disagreement — it changes the energy of it.”*

*“When we feel understood, our brain literally shifts from a threat mode to a safe mode.*

*That’s because empathy calms the amygdala — the part of our brain that sounds the alarm — and activates the prefrontal cortex, which helps us think clearly.”*

*“In short, empathy helps our nervous system reset so we can think and feel better.”*



#### 4 **The Pduse** → **Listen** → **Reflect** → **Res1ond** *model*

*"Here's a simplefour-step model to use  
when tension rises."*

**Ste1 1: Pduse** :*"Before reacting, take a breath. A  
micro-pause ofeventfive seconds canprevent a major  
blow-up. Research shows that those tinypauses lower  
the body's stress response."*

**Ste1 2: Listen** :*"Let the otherperson speak — not to  
find theflaw in their argument, but to really hear  
what's under the surface."*

**Ste1 3: Reflect** :*"Paraphrase or summarize whatyou  
heard: 'It sounds like you're upset because...' or 'If  
understand right, youfelt left out when...'  
This small step communicates: I'm trying to  
understand you, not defeatyou."*

**Ste1 4: Res1ond** :*"Only now, share yourperspective.  
The goal is dialogue, not defense."*



· PAUSE ·  
AND  
REFLECT



“So we’ve talked about empathy in conflict — now let’s make it practical.  
How can we bring empathy into daily conversations, especially under pressure?”

## 8 WAYS TO PRACTICE EMPATHY

Empathy is a superpower. It allows us to connect with others on a deeper level and to build stronger relationships. It also makes us more creative and innovative.



## Key Practices

**Active Listening** “Most people listen to reply. Empathic people listen to understand.

That means — no interrupting, no planning your comeback, just presence.

Silence is powerful. It tells the other person: ‘I’m here with you.’”

**Mirroring and Paraphrasing** “Mirroring is when we reflect what we hear — not word-for-word, but essence-for-essence.

Say: ‘You sound really disappointed that it turned out this way.’

It’s a small moment, but it makes people feel deeply seen.” “Research shows that paraphrasing lowers heart rate and defensiveness — people literally physiologically relax when they feel heard.”

**Ask Open-Ended Questions** “Instead of ‘Are you okay?’ try ‘What’s been hardest about this?’ Instead of ‘Do you need help?’ try ‘How can I support you right now?’

Open questions open hearts.”

**Validate Feelings Before Fixing Problems** “We often rush to fix. But most of the time, people aren’t looking for a solution first — they’re looking for validation.”

“When you say, ‘I can see that really hurt,’ or ‘That must have been frustrating,’ the other person feels safe enough to move forward.”

“Once feelings are acknowledged, problem-solving becomes smoother.”



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### Advantages of Open-Ended Questions



Allow for unlimited responses



Provide more detail



Deliver new insights



Offer deeper qualitative data



Give you sentiment and opinions



Follow the whole customer journey

HorrayLearm

### 3 Steps to Practice Emotional Validation

Acknowledge the feeling without any judgements:

I am feeling \_\_\_\_\_  
(eg. sad, angry, etc).

Allow yourself to feel the emotion by using self-validating statements:

Create your own or choose from one of the following that resonates with you;  
-My feelings are valid  
-It's normal to feel this way  
-It's okay to cry  
-I'm worthy and loved.

Understand why you are feeling this way right now:

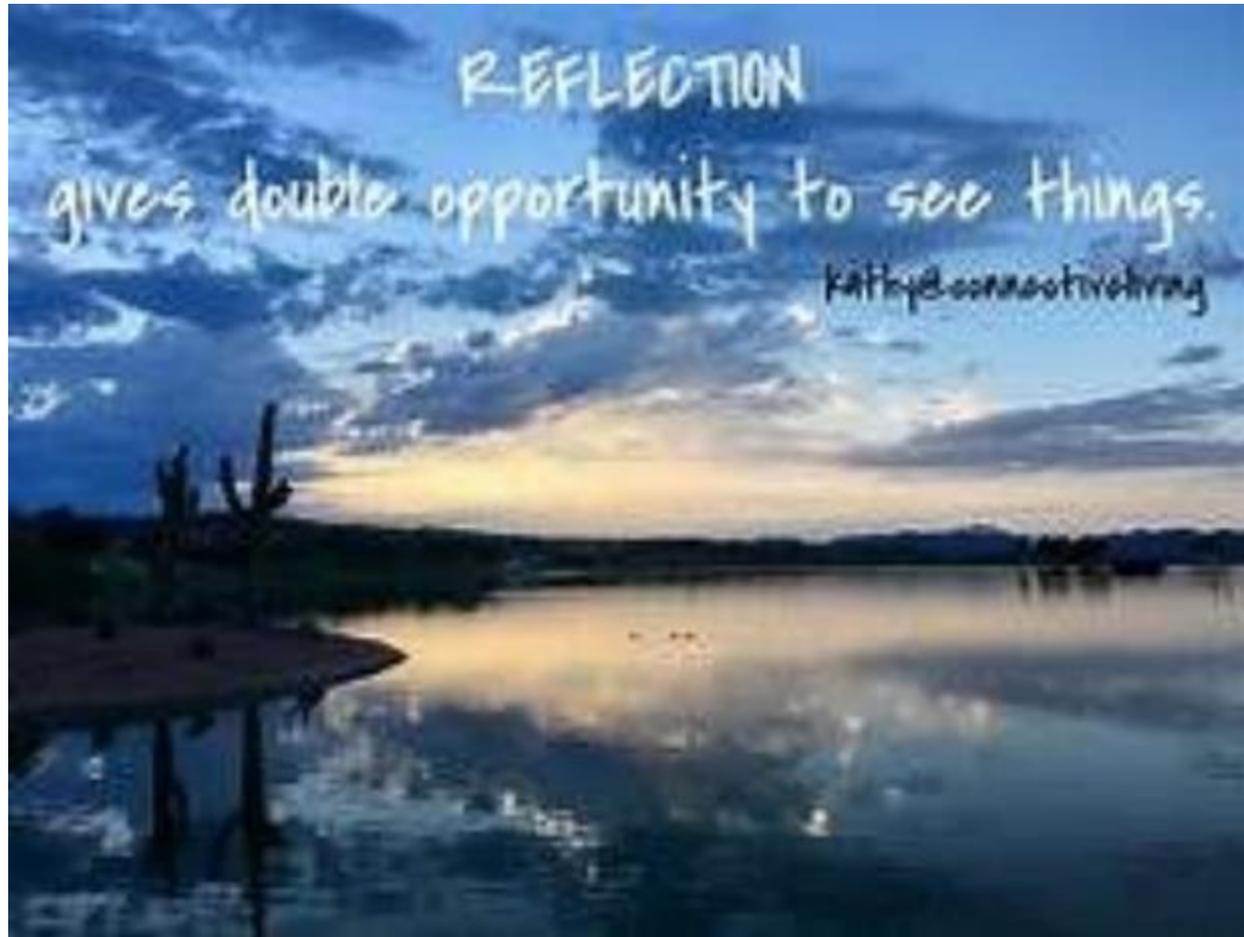
Eg. I am feeling sad because I lost my job.



## REFLECTION & APPLICATION

### Transition

“We’ve **explored** what empathy is, how it works in our brains, and how we can practice it in daily life — especially during conflict. Let’s now **slow down and make it personal**. This next part is about you — how empathy shows up, or could show up, in your own world.” [Reflective Learning Questionnaire](#)  
[-Empathy in Action](#)



“Empathy is a practice, a habit, and a mindset.

Every time you pause, listen, try to understand before judging, you strengthen that muscle.”



Thank You



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