
INTRODUCTION



Congratulations and thank you for acquiring *Enhancing Empathy*. The best news is that you can develop empathy, even if you feel that you've never had it before. You can learn how to act compassionately, even though you've seriously hurt others in your life by physically, emotionally, or sexually abusing them!

This workbook was developed to help people who have a variety of problems. This workbook can help you develop positive attitudes and behaviors toward others. Before you can work on developing empathy, you need to understand why you have hurt and/or abused others and how you can stop. Trying to develop empathy without having stopped abusive behavior is impossible!

You can stop abusive behavior by learning about the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that make up your cycle of abuse. You also must learn about risk factors for harmful behavior, and interventions to stop abusing.

If you are going to develop empathy, you must first take responsibility for your harmful and abusive behavior. This means you cannot deny or minimize your behavior. If you insist you have never hurt anyone, it is unlikely that you will ever understand compassion. In denial, you are blocking from your thoughts the all too real pain of people who you have harmed.

In this book we will discuss empathy. No one is completely empathic and sensitive all the time. We all fail far too often; that is the human condition. Even though we know we'll never be perfect we still need to strive for an important goal. When we use the North Star to guide us, we never expect to reach the star, but it can be very helpful steering us along our path. Some people never look up and notice where they are headed. We hope that you will choose to direct your life toward the bright star of empathy.

“Empathy can be learned...”

Empathy can be learned, but to learn it you must be willing to practice. Even people with highly developed empathy must use it frequently. When they don't, their ability to feel empathy and compassion weakens and dries up. This workbook provides you with many opportunities to practice empathy and compassion through assignments and exercises. When you do not understand an assignment, ask your therapist, group, or a close friend for help. Do not write in this workbook, use a special notebook. Then review your assignments with your therapist, group, or a friend.

We strongly recommend that you join a treatment program or work with a therapist. Some persons must work through the book on their own because no treatment of any kind is available. If you are in this situation, it is very important to share your assignments with someone you trust to give you accurate, honest feedback. This person must be able to handle hearing difficult stuff and not reject you. This person must not be a potential victim, and must not be helping you continue to harm others. This person would have to be understanding and willing to learn all about your abusive behavior. Finding someone like that is a very tough assignment, but it is a first serious step on the road to changing your life.

The short version of why you should read this book goes something like this:

1. You have done things that hurt people: you have done bad things, but you are not a bad person.
2. You have hurt other people because that's how you learned to show your anger or meet your emotional needs.
3. You may have learned to meet your needs in these hurtful ways because you were abused physically, emotionally, or sexually, or simply by learning from your environment. Even when this is true, it is not an excuse for hurting others.
4. You can learn how to respond to situations, relate to people, and meet your needs in ways that don't hurt other people.
5. Learning to relate to others and meet your needs without hurting other people isn't easy, but it is rewarding and helps you be closer to others, raises your self-esteem, and may help you make real friends.
6. Learning empathy, to feel how others feel, is part of learning to relate to others and meet your needs without hurting someone else. Reading this book and doing the exercises will help you learn empathy.
7. You, and only you, have the power to change the way you relate to other people and the world.

We congratulate you on your efforts to change your life for the better. We wish you courage and determination in carrying out your treatment program and in completing this workbook. We hope this workbook will be a useful tool. Good luck!

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