



Thoughts on Empathy

Definition:

Seeing another's situation as through *her* eyes with understanding, refraining from judgment.

Three Components of Empathy:

1. Imagination

"I can imagine how frustrated I would feel if I'd disobeyed my parents, played ball in the house, and broken a lamp."

2. Recollection

"I remember how I felt when I recently erased my friend's diskette by being careless with it. I felt foolish."

3. Synthesis, putting it together

"Perhaps John feels foolish right now. I can see how it must look from his perspective."

Why Be Empathic?

- Carl Rogers called *being empathic* a highly underrated "way of being."
- "Over the years...research evidence has been piling up, and it points strongly to the conclusion that a high degree of empathy in a relationship is possibly the most potent factor in bringing about change and learning." Carl Rogers.
- Empathy allows the child to focus on their problem. We don't steal their opportunity to learn by distracting them with our condescension, or anger.
- Being empathic is honest. It allows children to be imperfect, to make mistakes, and learn from them just as we did, and still do. It doesn't irrationally demand that kids have all the knowledge we do as adults.
- Being empathic gives both the child and the adult a sense of *connectedness*. It dissolves alienation. Connectedness is a trait of high self-esteem. We cement our relationships with our kids when we practice empathy. Keep in mind those later years when we want them to come to us with the biggies.

- Being empathic is associated with mental health.
- One can be empathic in good times and bad, through both the big problems in life and through the sundry small events.
- It models *perspective taking*, an ability that will serve our children well in the future.