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Empathy has no script. There is no right way or wrong way to do it. It's simply listening, holding space, with holding judgment, emotionally connecting, and communicating that incredibly healing message of 'You're not alone!'

BRENE BROWN

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Empathy guesses



Listening and identifying what others may be feeling and needing as a way to make compassionate connections.

Empathy misses

Sympathy vs. Empathy

Responding with sympathy (“I feel so sorry for you”) rather than empathy (“I get it, I feel with you”)

The Gasp and Awe

Hearing your story and feeling shame on your behalf.

The Mighty Fall

Seeing you as perfect. They are so let down by your imperfections and disappointed in you (“I just never expected that from you. I didn’t think you would ever be someone who didn’t do well. What happened?”)

The Block and Tackle

Being so uncomfortable with vulnerability that they criticize you (“What happened?! What were you thinking?”)

The Boots and Shovel

Making it better and, out of their own discomfort, refuses to acknowledge that you can actually make terrible choices (“You’re exaggerating. It wasn’t that bad. You rock. You’re perfect. Everyone loves you”). They are trying so hard to make you feel better that they’re unable to connect with your emotions.

If You Think That’s Bad...

Confuses “connection” with the opportunity to one-up you. (“That’s nothing. Listen to what happened to me one time!”)

I Can Fix That!

Immediately jumping to problem-solving rather than just being with you in your experience.

Most of us struggle with this one, especially if colleagues often come to us for help solving problems. One helpful empathic reply is to acknowledge the feelings and ask, “What does support look like?” This gives the person in struggle the opportunity to say, “Just listening helps” or “Can you help me figure this out?”



Based on work of Brene Brown

Activity: Empathy guesses and empathy misses

In pairs choose one person to be the speaker and one to be the listener. Speaker – describe a situation at work where you have had unpleasant feelings, Listener – choose an empathy miss and respond to your partner using it. Speaker share how this felt.

Then Speaker repeat your story and this time Listener – replace your response with an empathy guess.

Are you feeling....

Because you need...