

**Psychology of Personality and Individual Differences: Theory and Applications**

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**Lecture 26: Positive personality trait: Empathy**

I welcome you all to the module 11 of this course. This is the third lecture of module 11 and overall it is lecture number 26. Module 11 is about developing positive personality traits and in today's lecture, we will be talking about empathy as a personality trait. Before we begin today's lecture, let me give you a brief recap of the last lecture. In the last lecture, that is lecture number 25, which is also part of the same module, we talked about positive personality traits, specifically the resilient personality trait. We discussed what is the meaning of resilient personality trait, what are its characteristics, and the different traits associated with the resilient personality. We discussed both internal trait as well as interpersonal traits, and at the end we discussed clinical applications or implications of this resilient personality trait. We discussed some of these implications in the clinical settings.

In today's lecture we will more specifically focus on empathy as a trait which is a positive personality trait. We will be discussing the concepts of empathy, sympathy, and compassion. We will also be talking about the different aspects of empathy.

We will be talking about some of the neurological systems that are associated with empathy. We will discuss some of the variables that are associated with empathy. We will also discuss how we can cultivate empathy in our lives. So let us start today's lecture. So let us start with the concept of empathy.

What is the meaning of empathy? Now, empathy is basically derived from a Greek word 'empathia' which basically means 'feeling into'. So when we are faced with emotions of another individual or whenever we observe a certain kind of emotions being expressed by someone else, we frequently experience a natural inclination to adopt and share that person's emotional state. If we are connected with another individual, whatever emotions that person is expressing, we generally feel like reciprocating, adopting or sharing the same emotions with that person.

So, a sense of empathy comes from that sense or natural inclination towards getting connected with others' emotions. So, in this way, one person's sorrow can transform into your sorrow, and one's happiness can become your own happiness as well. This kind of

response, where an observer mirrors the emotional experience of another person, is called empathy. When we mirror someone else's emotions, that is called the sense of empathy. So, empathy is generally described as the capacity of an individual to imagine themselves in someone else's situation or putting themselves in someone else's shoes. Putting yourself in the shoes of another person means you put yourself in the position of another person and just look at the world from that person's perspective. So this is one important aspect of empathy.

When you put yourself in another person's shoes, you will be able to understand what emotions a person is experiencing. This involves understanding, empathy, acknowledging emotions, and effectively expressing these feelings to others. So, empathy involves being mindful of the feelings, needs, and concerns of others.

More empathetic people are more mindful and sensitive to the feelings, needs, and concerns of other individuals; only then are they able to experience a sense of empathy. So, empathy encompasses a range of competencies, including understanding others, facilitating their development, embracing diversity, being politically aware, and many other aspects that can contribute to the development of empathy, some of which we will be talking about in this lecture. So empathy mostly comes from the understanding of another's perspective. In humans, empathy can emerge even in the absence of another person, sometimes through imagination or thinking about someone else, even though they may not be physically present.

Just thinking and imagining someone else, we can also experience empathy. The significance of empathy lies partly in the ability to establish effective and efficient connections with others. The more we feel connected to another individual, the more we are likely to experience empathy. Empathy is basically a kind of psychological super glue.

It connects people. It is like a glue that connects people or helps us connect to people. Thus, empathy connects people and undergirds cooperation and kindness.

Whatever cooperation we see among people, whatever kindness we see among people, one of the foundations of this kindness and cooperation is the sense of empathy. Otherwise, no one will cooperate. No one will show kindness. These emotions, which are very important in the social world, come from the sense of empathy.

Empathy is recognized as a key characteristic of emotional intelligence and assumes a significant role in all theories of emotional intelligence. Empathy is one of the very

important components of emotional intelligence. Emotional Intelligence is an important concept, and research has found it to be a crucial determinant of one's success in their personal and professional life.

Now, to understand the implications of empathy, we can imagine certain situations that reflect the importance of empathy in the social world. Imagine a world without empathy. Imagine a child crying due to hunger and desperately needing someone's response. It could be the mother's response. But no one is helping that child or feeding that child. What kind of consequence or outcome can we expect in this situation? Picture yourself in extreme pain in a hospital, longing for the attention of a nurse or doctor, but no one is attending to you. Just imagine being unable to walk due to old age, and no one is helping you to walk or cross the road. Visualize that you are lying on the road because of an accident, and no one is helping you.

Experience, let's say you are experiencing emotional turmoil or depression, and you want to share that feeling with someone, but no one is willing to listen to you. Imagine being consumed by depression after a major career disappointment, lacking anyone to console or provide encouragement. These are some of the situations that we can imagine. Let's say in all these situations, no one is showing concern or supporting you. It's going to have very devastating consequences.

No one is coming to help you in all these situations due to the lack of empathy. Thus, one of the main reasons behind the helping and supportive nature of people is empathy. If people lack empathy completely, no one will come forward and help you. These imaginary situations show the importance of the sense of empathy in the social world, where we depend on each other in so many aspects of our lives. Thus, empathy plays a very vital role in terms of connecting each of us with others and helping each of us in various challenging situations or adverse situations in our lives. So this all reflects the importance of empathy in our social world.

So these situations emphasize the profound repercussions of a world lacking empathy. It highlights the immense value of empathy in addressing human needs: comfort, connection, and support. We cannot think of a world without empathy. Before we talk about some of the other aspects of empathy, there are three terms which people often use synonymously, but they are not synonymous.

They are very similar terms, but with different connotations. One is empathy, another is sympathy, and another is compassion. Many people often use them in almost the same way.

But technically, there are certain differences. These three terms are distinct concepts that relate to understanding and responding to the emotions and experiences of others.

All three terms generally share the same context. In the context of responding to another person's emotions, all three concepts are used to describe those situations. What are the technical differences between these three terms? Sympathy basically refers to the feeling of pity or sorrow for someone else's misfortune or suffering. Whenever someone else is suffering or undergoing hardships in their life, you feel a sense of sorrow or pity for that person; that is called sympathy. You are looking at the situation of another person, and you are feeling bad about that person; that is called sympathy. It involves recognizing and acknowledging another person's emotions without necessarily sharing the same experience or emotion. You acknowledge the situation of another person and without necessarily really putting yourself into their position and deeply connecting with them, which is the concept of empathy. So, in a sense, sympathy is a little superficial compared to empathy. Empathy has a deep connection, which may not be in this instance of sympathy. In sympathy, you only feel bad about looking at someone's situation. You may not be deeply connected with the situation of that person, you just feel sorry, and a sense of pity. Sympathy often involves expressing care. You may express care, concern, and support for someone. But it may not involve the same level of emotional connection or understanding as empathy. In comparison to empathy, sympathy is a little superficial in terms of connection or in terms of the intensity of emotion that a person experiences in response to another's emotions.

Empathy, as we have already discussed, is more like putting yourself in the position of that person or sharing the feelings of another person. It involves looking at the world through their perspective. So, there is a deeper identification with the situation of another person. Empathy requires emotional connection and actively seeking to understand and validate someone else's feelings.

It is focused on the emotions and perspective of another person. It is more of a deeper connection in terms of emotions as compared to sympathy. So empathy involves a deeper emotional connection with others, as it requires genuinely experiencing and connecting with the emotions of another person. Sympathy involves showing concern, but may not involve the same level of emotional engagement with another person. So that is the difference. In terms of expression, they may be very similar, but in terms of actual emotional connection, empathy is much deeper.

The third one is compassion. It is a broader concept which may include both sympathy and empathy. So, compassion is a broader concept, under which empathy and sympathy both can fall.

So, compassion encompasses empathy, sympathy, and also goes beyond that. How does it go beyond that? Compassion involves not only understanding and acknowledging someone's emotions but also feeling a genuine desire to alleviate their suffering or help them in some way. So the sense of action is also important in compassion. You not only feel a sense of connection, sympathy, and empathy, but you also try to remove the suffering of that person by taking certain actions.

Therefore, compassion is broader in that sense. It combines empathy and sympathy with a sense of action and a genuine wish to provide comfort, support, and assistance to another person's needs. So, in terms of broadness, compassion is the broadest term as compared to sympathy and empathy. So, these three terms are sometimes used in day-to-day language very synonymously. But technically, they have differences in the extent to which the person gets engaged with another person emotionally.

So, to summarize, empathy is about understanding and sharing others' emotions. Sympathy involves feeling sorrow for someone's situation. Compassion encompasses both sympathy and empathy while also emphasizing the intention to remove the suffering and offer help. This is how it is arranged in terms of the intensity of emotion. At the lowest level, it is a sense of pity, then it comes to sympathy, then comes empathy, and at the end, it comes to compassion.

So, in terms of the intensity of emotion, it is moving from lower to higher. From pity or sympathy to compassion. So, these are the terms that denote different levels of emotional connection with another person. So, empathy, just like resilience, can be both a trait as well as a state.

Empathy is basically shaped by both an individual's trait capacity and situational influences. Some people, by nature, have more empathy. So, empathy is like their personality trait. In most situations, when there is a sense of emotional expression from another person, they will feel a sense of empathy. So, in general, their ability is such that they frequently experience it in most situations. It is like their inherent identity, a sense of empathy. Characteristics that they define all the time, that exude from them constantly. So, a trait is more like the personal characteristics they show in most situations. State empathy, it means that one may not have a very high trait of empathy, but sometimes, because of a

situation, they may show empathy in certain circumstances. So, in state empathy, the expression or feeling of empathy is dependent on the state or the environmental situation.

So, this is how trait empathy is different from state empathy. So, empathy is generally shaped by individual state capacity and situational influences. Some people may not be very highly empathetic, but in certain situations, they become highly empathetic because of the situation; this is called state empathy. Trait empathy refers to a stable ability that demonstrates empathy, which is strongly linked to interpersonal traits. For example, if a person consistently feels compassion or a sense of empathy for others in distress, every time that person sees someone in distress, he or she will also feel a sense of very strong connection and distress in themselves. So, trait becomes a very stable characteristic which remains with that person in all situations, or most situations. In contrast, state empathy is a temporary emotional response triggered by specific situations. For example, feeling sudden empathy when witnessing someone in pain.

Now, someone without having a trait of very strong empathy may become highly empathetic in some situations. So, that is the difference between trait and state empathy. So, we are mostly looking at empathy as a personality trait, and also discussing its benefits and implications.

In this particular course on personality, we are talking about empathy from the perspective of traits, but it can also be from the state perspective, where it can be a product of the situation as well.

Now, researchers have tried to find connections between the big five factors or trait factors and empathy. I will be discussing some research findings here.

The big five model consists of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. These are the big five traits model, which has the highest research support. These are the five traits by which we can discuss almost all the individual variations and characteristics of human beings. How are these five traits connected to the sense of empathy? Let us discuss some of the research findings.

So, one of the traits which has been consistently linked with empathy is agreeableness. This trait is most strongly correlated with empathy, especially emotional empathy—the feeling of what others feel. Thus, the sense of empathy is very much embedded in the trait of agreeableness. People with high agreeableness are generally found to also show higher

empathy. Individuals high in agreeableness tend to be compassionate, cooperative, and motivated to maintain harmonious relationships.

So these are the characteristics of agreeableness. People with higher agreeableness traits are more compassionate, more cooperative, have better relationships, less conflict, and more harmonious relationships. This natural tendency toward kindness and understanding makes people more empathetic. This is the reason why agreeableness is strongly connected to the sense of empathy. Thus, among the Big Five, most research shows that agreeableness is a very strong predictor of empathy.

Another trait among the Big Five is openness to experience. Some research also shows that people high in this trait are also empathetic. Generally, they show characteristics of being imaginative, curious, and open to new experiences, which generally fosters the cognitive aspect of empathy. This will be discussed later.

Cognitive aspect of empathy basically means mentally how you can understand others' perspectives. Thus, openness to experience is generally strongly connected to the cognitive aspect of empathy. The more you understand the perspective of another person, the more likely you are to feel a connection with that person or express emotions accordingly.

People high in openness to experience are better at seeing things from multiple points of view which enhances their ability to empathize intellectually even in the situation outside their personal experiences. Thus, because of this ability of openness to experience, people are more likely to understand the perspective of others and feel empathy. Thus, openness to experience has also been found to be connected to the sense of empathy.

Then another trait among these five is conscientiousness. This is a trait associated with being characterized by behaving in a responsible, organized, and dependable way. People with high conscientiousness are very organized, responsible and dependable. You can depend on them, and if you give them some task, they will complete it, and they have a very organized and very structured life. Conscientiousness is not as strongly connected with empathy as agreeableness or openness; however, conscientious people, because of their certain characteristics, often show empathetic behavior in structured and caring roles. If they, in a structured situation, have to do certain services related to caring for other people, they are very good at it.

So structured or caring roles, such as helping others in an organized, deliberate manner, like caregiving professions such as nursing, or in a very structured situation where they had

to provide support according to the rules and regulations, conscientious people have shown very high empathy in those situations.

The relationship of the other two traits in the big five factors, neuroticism and extroversion, with empathy is not very clear.

Some studies show there are certain relationships between them, while other research does not show such a strong connection. Therefore, the relationship of neuroticism and extraversion with empathy is not very clear in the research findings. Thus, among the big five factors, three traits have been found to be important predictors of empathy, and the most important trait among them is agreeableness.

Now, when we talk about empathy as a trait or as a quality, it has three important aspects or three major components. All three contribute to the sense of empathy. One is the cognitive aspect, which we briefly discussed in the earlier slide. Then there is emotional empathy, and then there is empathic concern. Let us see what these three aspects of empathy are.

Cognitive empathy is more about mentally understanding others' perspectives. It is also known as perspective-taking empathy. It refers to the ability to understand and intellectually grasp the thoughts, beliefs, and emotions of others. It involves intellectual thought processes to understand the perspective of another person.

It involves understanding how other people look at the world. What are their thought processes? So, the extent to which you can understand others' perspectives is the cognitive part of empathy. Without the cognitive part, you cannot feel, as feelings are derived from your understanding.

So, the cognitive aspect is very important. It gives you a sense of understanding, and from that understanding, you also feel accordingly. It involves putting yourself in someone else's shoes and seeing the world from their perspective. So this cognitive empathy relies on mental processes such as perspective shifting, theory of mind, imagining how someone else might think, and so on. It is more of a mental ability or ability of thought processes to understand others' perspective. So, this is called cognitive empathy.

The next is emotional empathy. As a layman, we understand empathy mostly from the perspective of emotional empathy. Emotional Empathy basically involves sharing and experiencing the emotions of others. So, under emotional empathy, you are experiencing the same emotions that others are experiencing.



So, that is the emotional part of empathy. It is the capacity to feel what someone is feeling. Emotional empathy involves the ability to understand is the cognitive part, or the ability to feel others' feelings. Emotional empathy enables individuals to resonate with and respond emotionally to the experiences and emotional states of others. It enables visceral or automatic emotional reaction that mirrors the emotions of other people. People with high empathy automatically mirror the emotions of others. So, they can connect with others more easily. These people have an automatic empathetic response within them, which makes them naturally higher in the traits of empathy. This is called the emotional aspects of empathy.

The last one is empathic concern, which is more like compassion that we discussed earlier. It's the compassion part of empathy. Empathic compassion goes beyond understanding and sharing emotions. It involves a genuine and compassionate concern for well-being of others. As a genuine concern and you try to remove their suffering and try to do whatever best possible.

So, under empathetic concern, you express not just in terms of emotion and understanding, but also in terms of action. Empathic concern motivates individuals to take action and help remove their suffering or difficulties faced by another individual. It includes a sense of warmth, kindness, desire to support those in need. So basically, this is the compassion aspect that we discussed in the earlier slide. So that is called the empathic concern.

So, these are three important aspects of empathy. One is the cognitive part, where you can mostly understand the perspective of another person. Emotional empathy is more of a feeling of the feelings of another person, and empathic concern is more of an action-oriented response that goes beyond just feeling and understanding. Thus, these are the three parts, and each of the three parts is connected, and all three parts contribute to the sense of empathy. So these are three important components of empathy. The different aspects of empathy collectively contribute to our ability to connect with other individuals emotionally or compassionately.

Now, let us look at the biological part of empathy. Why do some people have high empathy, and why do some people have lower empathy? One of the reasons that has been found in the neurological system is called the mirror neuron system, or mirror neurons. This was first described by Rizzolatti and his colleagues in the 1990s.

They were doing some research on monkeys, and they discovered something called mirror neurons. These are the neurons in our brain that promote understanding of others'

perspectives, including empathy. This mirror neuron is a type of neuron or nerve cell that exhibits activity both when an animal or human performs a specific action and when it observes another animal or human performing the same action. This neuron mirrors the observed action, hence its name. So basically, because of these mirror neurons, by looking at others, we are able to feel or experience the same thing like others, as if we are doing it ourselves.

So, if I use my hand to lift an object, certain neurons will fire in my brain. But if I also look at someone else lifting that object, the same set of neurons will fire, as if you are lifting it when you observe it. When you look at someone else doing something, your neurons behave as if you are also doing it. So that's called the mirror neurons. Because of these mirror neurons, we are able to mirror someone else's actions or emotions. These mirror neurons have been proposed as the biological basis or mechanism for a lot of social behavior, including empathy and other social cognitive aspects. So, because of these mirror neurons, we are able to empathize with another person. Without these mirror neurons, we would not be able to feel empathy for another person. So, this term mirrors neurons often refers to a broader concept of a network of brain regions. So, mirror neurons don't mean just one neuron in the brain.

So, it's a network of certain regions in the brain that connect, fire and sends signals from one part to another part, and that helps to imitate someone else's action, as if it is happening within you. This mirror neuron system in humans is believed to involve a distributed network of interconnected brain regions (such as premotor cortex and the inferior parietal lobule) rather than some isolated mirror neurons.

So it includes different regions of the brain. Many researchers contributed to the understanding of how mirror neurons contribute to the sense of empathy. Researchers like Marco Lacoboni, Gallese, and Keysers, did a lot of research in this direction.

Activation of mirror neurons during observation could potentially lead to a vicarious experience of the observed emotions. So you see someone else expressing certain emotions, the mirror neuron fires, and you are able to activate the same emotional regions in the brain. So you almost experience the same emotion as the other person. For example, when you witness someone expressing happiness or sadness, the mirror neuron system may activate similar neural circuits associated with your own experience of happiness or sadness, allowing you to empathize with the other person.

However, it is important to note that mirror neurons are just one component of a larger network involving empathy. So, empathy is not just about mirror neurons. It could be one aspect of empathy. There can be many other things involved in empathy. Empathy is a multifaceted construct. It involves cognitive processes, perspective-taking, and many mental aspects, not just physiological ones. But mirror neurons may provide biological support for it. So overall, mirror neurons are a very promising area of research, and it is still ongoing. They have contributed to our understanding of empathy in terms of biological or neurological aspects. These are like one piece of a larger puzzle in understanding empathy. More clarity will come in the future, once more research is done in this area.

We are treating empathy as a very positive trait, it is important because in this world without empathy, we would not be able to survive and we would have a lot of conflicts. There would not be any peace or cooperation among people, nor any sense of connection or friendship without empathy. So, this is a very important construct that binds us all together, giving a positive direction to humanity as a whole. In that sense, we are saying that empathy is a positive trait.

Research shows that empathy can predict a lot of other qualities or behaviors of human beings. People who show higher empathy are more likely to exhibit many other positive characteristics or qualities. Some of the research findings are listed here. So, indicators of empathy have been found to predict various indicators of prosocial behavior, such as forgiveness, volunteering to help others, and empathy also reports a negative association with aggression and bullying. So, people with higher empathy show less aggression and less bullying. They are more likely to forgive and more likely to help others. Thus, many indicators of prosocial behavior or helping behaviors are connected to a sense of empathy. So, these are all research findings.

Research also shows that people with higher empathy give more charitable donations to needy people. Empathy can also override non-cooperation, causing people to be more generous and forgiving and less retaliative. So, basically, empathy promotes cooperation and more harmonious behavior. Empathy can also help people adopt more positive attitudes and helping behaviors towards stigmatized groups, particularly disabled and homeless individuals, and those with AIDS. It is because of the empathy people show concern or help stigmatized people.

A lot of people in the general population may not help people who are disabled, homeless, or have AIDS. But people with higher empathy are more likely to have positive attitudes

towards these people, and from their attitude, they may also show many positive behaviors towards them. So, we can see here that empathy can predict a lot of other positive characteristics or behaviors that are connected to the sense of empathy.

Now we also need to understand that when we talk about empathy, we need to discuss the right kind of empathy. So, if you have a very strong sense of empathy, it could be very draining because if you get too much affected by others' emotions, it will also affect you personally. So, what is the right kind of empathy? Some researchers have tried to look into this phenomenon. Empathy is a good quality, but it can also be draining on individuals. So, what aspects of empathy or what kind of empathy is better?

Despite a lot of potential advantages that we had discussed, empathy alone does not guarantee positive social outcomes for some people if it becomes a draining process for them. Cultivation of empathy for effective assistance necessitates the right kind of strategy. So, some right kind of strategy must be there, then only people with higher empathy can be able to help other people. Otherwise, if it is too draining and they become highly affected, they will not be able to help other people.

So that is very important in terms of its applications. Empathy is not practiced correctly; it can become an emotionally draining skill. Because you will get so much affected by others' suffering that you yourself will not be able to function properly. Excessive identification with someone else's emotions can induce stress, triggering a cardiovascular stress response similar to the physiological reaction one would experience in painful or threatening situation. So, you will almost experience the same pain, which will also make you unable to help others.

Empathy, by directing helping behavior primarily towards individuals with one's own group, may even impede the helping behavior to others, and also promote antagonism and aggression. Sometimes people become only empathetic for certain groups of people, their own group, which may hinder helping people in other groups. This can also be a problematic aspect of empathy. Therefore, how one employs empathy and perspective may determine the differential outcomes. Thus, what kind of empathy you show is also very important.

Let us see what kind of empathy is right empathy. Perspective taking is a very important aspect of empathy. Empathy is very strongly connected to one's understanding of others' perspectives. Perspective taking involves understanding how another person is thinking and feeling.

Perspective taking can be two types. In two ways one can take perspective. This is where the difference in the outcomes of empathy will occur. One is the 'self-oriented perspective' and the other is the 'other-oriented perspective'. Both can promote empathy, but the outcome can be very different. So, what is the right kind of empathy?

The answer lies in these two types of perspective taking. Whether you are taking self-oriented perspective or you are taking other other-oriented perspective. Let us see what these two perspectives are.

Self-oriented perspective taking: Several adverse consequences or a draining process takes place because of self-oriented perspective. It is a form of empathy known as self-oriented perspective taking which involves imagining oneself in someone else's situation.

Although empathy is mostly defined in this concept, that you put yourself in the same position, then you also suffer like the other person. That will also promote empathy, no doubt. Empathy is also defined like this way in most of the definitions.

But when you almost identify with that person and put yourself in the same position as another person, then such empathy can be very draining. Draining in a sense, because you will also suffer exactly like the other person. So, this is called a self-oriented perspective. Engaging in self-oriented perspective taking, where individuals imagine themselves in another person's position, can lead to significant personal distress, which may hinder the display of prosocial behavior or helping behavior because of fatigue, the compassion fatigue.

The person will become too influenced and too fatigued because of their own emotions. This is also empathy, but this self-oriented perspective-taking can be a very draining process. It may also hinder helping behavior in certain situations.

Another way of perspective-taking is called the other-oriented perspective. It involves perspective-taking, where individuals imagine and understand another person's point of view. They imagine and try to understand another person's point of view. They read their emotions and grasp their experiences in a broader sense, rather than putting themselves in other's position and suffering equally. So, in an other-oriented perspective, the person imagines and understands other's point of view, rather than just immersing themselves in that emotional situation. So that's the difference. This will also promote empathy. The first one is also empathy, but the outcome can be different in both cases. This form of empathy

proves most beneficial for both the giver and the receiver, and is characterized by an other-oriented perspective.

So, engaging in this other-oriented perspective taking can lead to the development of empathic concern. The person will understand others' position and also show concern. They will show compassion and also be able to help another person because they will not become highly debilitated by their own emotions due to too much empathy. They will be a little bit aloof from that and will be able to help that person. Empathic concern is commonly referred to as compassion, which can be perceived as an emotional response stemming from a cognitive process. This emotion has the potential to stimulate helping behaviors. In such cases, one is more likely to help because then they will be able to function better. When people identify too much with another's position, then they suffer so much that they are not able to help another person. So this other-oriented perspective-taking can be more beneficial in terms of helping behavior.

In terms of self-oriented perspective-taking, many people can also help, but in many situations, it can become a highly draining process and may not allow them to help to their best potential.

In terms of taking steps toward empathy, people have reported various steps. One possible way is that you recognize the other person's situation, then you remove your judgment, followed by trying to understand the other person and finally respond with empathy.

You remove your judgments and try to wear others' shoes, and then respond. So this is generally the step that many people can take towards empathy. Some researchers say these are the steps one should take in terms of showing empathy or behaving in ways that help other people. So that could be one way. Recognize first, then remove your own judgments and biases.

Then only you will be able to understand others' perspectives. If you are so full of your own ideas, you will not be able to understand others' perspectives. To understand others' perspectives, you have to remove your own biases and assumptions. Then you try to understand others' perspectives, wear others' shoes, and then respond. So, this could be one of the simplest way of responding empathetically.

The main important question is, can we cultivate empathy or enhance this ability? When we talk about something as a trait, it generally is it looks like a fixed or rigid characteristic that either people have or they don't have, but in the case of traits like empathy or resilience,

they can also be shaped. Most of the traits also can be shaped or enhanced based on certain training of the mind or certain interventions. Similarly, empathy could be innate for some individuals, some people are naturally empathetic, you don't have to teach them. Some others may need to acquire it through deliberate learning. Some people can develop empathy through the learning process, particularly the kind of empathy involving the 'other-oriented perspective taking'. Developing this skill can also help reduce compassion fatigue that we talked about.

Therefore, there is a possibility of enhancing empathy by effectively teaching individuals how to practice it. So basically, we can have some intervention strategies to develop empathy by understanding different aspects of it.

Abramson in 2021 listed certain strategies that one can employ to enhance empathy. So one is, according to Abramson, that you know one important requirement for developing empathy is your desire to grow empathy. If you do not see the value of empathy, then there is no point in developing it. People who value this concept of empathy understand that it is an important aspect that promotes many positive things in one's life and others' lives. The desire to develop empathy is the first important step. If you don't have the desire, you cannot develop it. For developing any quality in the human mind, any psychological aspect, one has to be motivated to develop it. This is the first requirement.

You can have the best of other interventions and the best of people supporting you. No one can help you unless you want to grow. This is the problem with psychological phenomena. Most of the medical or pharmaceutical medical interventions, whether you like it or not, if you take a tablet or a pill, it will work. But in the psychological aspect, it doesn't work like that.

You have to be willing to do that, or there has to be inner motivation to grow in a certain direction, only then can it result in change. Others cannot directly force it. So that's the main thing with any kind of psychological qualities, if you want to develop. So, one is that there is a desire to grow empathy.

That mindset is very important. That desire, that motivation, must be there to develop empathy. People who believe that empathy can be developed are more likely to exert effort and motivation in empathizing, even in challenging situations where it may not come naturally. If they see the value of empathy and are motivated to enhance it, they can do it. So that is something very important. One is the desire to grow in empathy.

Second is exposure to differences is something very important. People who are exposed to different kinds of people, different varieties of backgrounds of people, are more likely to learn empathy or develop empathy because they have more understanding about the background or perspective of different kinds of people. If you don't understand the perspective or background of some people, then you cannot empathize with them. Only if you understand their perspective, their background, and their stories, then only can you empathize with them. So, exposure to differences is something very important. So, for effectively imagining another person's perspective, having a richer context or understanding is very important.

Engaging with diverse forms of media, such as reading books, watching movies featuring protagonists from different racial backgrounds, or actively participating in someone else's culture, can provide a backdrop for adopting someone else's view. The more we are exposed to different cultures, the more we gain understanding and knowledge about different backgrounds of people of different types, different cultural backgrounds, then the more we are likely to understand others' perspectives and show empathy. Thus, understanding is very important. Without that understanding, we cannot show empathy.

So, empathy comes from perspective taking or understanding, which will come only when we are exposed to different varieties of people from different cultures, different backgrounds, and different religious backgrounds. By paying closer attention to others, regardless of whether one is actively engaging in perspective-taking, individuals are more likely to develop heightened concern for others and become more invested in their experiences.

Another thing Abramson suggested is that sometimes reading fiction or novels can also help in cultivating empathy. Many stories that we read in books and stories, and movies are adapted from real-world characters. So the more we read about it, the more we see diverse characters from the stories in books or movies, which gives us an understanding of different kinds of mindsets. So, we can immerse ourselves in the narratives of different kinds of people. We can also enhance the capacity to understand real individuals in the real world simultaneously. So, reading fictional stories also helps us to grow in our understanding of others perspective.

Another way to cultivate empathy is by harnessing the power of oxytocin hormones. The hormone oxytocin is present in both males and females, but more prominent in females.



It is known for its social effects. This hormone actually has more social effects. What kind of social effects? It contributes to the facilitation of empathy. It has the ability to induce helping responses even among individuals who lack a blood relationship.

Many times, empathy is connected to biological aspects, such as the release of hormones like oxytocin promotes bonding. Behaviours such as making eye contact with people, gentle physical touch, handshake etc. can lead to more release of oxytocin as a hormone, which can promote bonding with other people and enhance empathy. Some of these biological aspects, like certain hormones such as oxytocin, when released due to certain behaviors, can also promote empathy.

Another way of enhancing empathy is finding common ground among people because the moment we see others as different from us, we cannot empathize with them, as we feel they are different. If you can find some common ground among people, then we will feel that they are also the same as us, and that will enhance the sense of empathy. So, a lot of these conflicts and problems that happen in the human world are because we feel others are different. Or if that person doesn't belong to my category, then conflict is bound to happen.

The moment we see certain common ground among people, we are more likely to feel empathy, connection, and cooperation. If we search, we can find common ground with all human beings, because in the first place, we are all human beings.

As a species, we are the same. Other things are socially constructed. People have created countries, people have created regions, people have created so many other things. But, ultimately, one of the common grounds is humanity. That is the common ground.

If you cannot find any common ground, at least on the humanity ground level, we can find common ground. Thus, finding common ground is something that also enhances our ability to connect and feel cooperation, as this is something very important. This is an effective method to enhance motivation by manipulating the perception of who belongs to your in-group. When a pre-existing social connection is absent, shared identity becomes difficult.

So, to cultivate empathy in your interactions, prioritize identifying similarities rather than fixating on differences. For example, suppose you have opposing political ideologies with another person. The moment you say this person is different in terms of ideologies, it becomes difficult to find empathy. But you can find many other common grounds with that person as well. Such as despite having opposing political ideologies, you and your

neighbour may discover that your children are of the same age and attend the same school. So, this can be a common ground. So, like this, we can find many common grounds with people. If we think that the relationship with the person is important, then rather than focusing on the differences, one can focus on the common ground, this will enhance cooperation and a sense of empathy.

So, by building upon this similarity, one can cultivate greater empathy. As individuals, we encompass multiple identities. We all have multiple identities. Some identities will conflict with other individuals, while some will be similar to others. So, where you focus is very important.

If you focus on the identities that conflict with another person, then conflict will arise. If you focus on identities that are shared with another person, then cooperation and empathy will emerge. These are some of the things or ways that we can focus on to enhance our empathy. So, these are some aspects of empathy, one of the positive personality traits, which is very important.

With this, I will stop here.

Thank you.