

EMPATHY & COMPASSION | TIPSHEET

Expanding our capacity for empathy and compassion is a worthwhile effort and doesn't require us to do anything drastic. These traits can be cultivated in our everyday lives and are necessary now more than ever if we value a society built on mutual respect and understanding. The list below contains a few key activities that can help foster and deepen our empathy and compassion.



Be a good listener

Listening is a powerful skill but many people are terrible at it because they remain inwardly focused on their own fears and desires. Truly listening means talking less and receiving more. It requires us to remain open-minded, to ask more questions, and to seek a deeper understanding of the other person.



Indulge in fiction

Reading fiction (and biographies) gives us a front-row seat into other's lives. Stories are a vehicle for mental flexibility, prompting us to imagine ourselves as the main character—or even multiple characters—and to practice empathizing with people whose motivations may be quite different from our own.



Step into other's shoes

Empathy and compassion are intricately linked with our ability to understand—at least in part—what someone else might be going through. Practice regularly imagining what it might be like if you were in a similar position (with all the same influences and information) as someone else. How would you feel? How would you react or behave?



Practice Metta

Metta (or “lovingkindness meditation”) is a simple exercise in mentally extending well wishes to family, friends, co-workers and even strangers. Simply bring a person or a group of people to mind and send feelings of kindness and warmth to them. You can find detailed instructions online.



Perform random acts of kindness

It feels good to help others. Even small acts of kindness release feel-good brain chemicals which makes us more likely to keep doing them. By being an example, we also encourage others to exhibit more empathy and compassion, making our communities stronger and more optimistic.