

Empathy in Healthcare

Empathy is defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person. An empathetic person:

- Is willing to view the other person’s perspective to attempt to ‘take a walk in their shoes’.
- Doesn’t judge the way that another person is feeling, but instead validates their feelings.
- Actively listens and responds appropriately with verbal and non-verbal communication.



Individuals facing hospitalization, rehabilitation, or placement after an injury or illness often experience strong emotions as they navigate a challenging chapter in their life. During this time, patients need empathetic support from their caregivers. According to recent study by Moudatsou, et al. (2020), empathy strengthens rapport between a patient and a caregiver, leading to improved patient satisfaction, enhanced therapeutic results and better health outcomes for both the patient and caregiver.

Implementing Empathy

<p>Take on Their Perspective</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Gather information about what factors could be contributing to the person’s feelings (i.e., lack of sleep, pain, disorientation, recent traumatic event, a new environment). ✓ Be mindful of your own personal experiences and biases and how they may affect your response. ✓ Respond in a way that reflects understanding of the person’s interpretation of their situation.
<p>Actively Listen</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Be present in the conversation, pay attention. Remove distractions. ✓ Ask probing questions that will help gain insight to how the person is feeling. Avoid the use of “why”, and focus on facts (i.e., what, where, who). Ask staff/loved ones, as needed, to paint a clearer picture. ✓ Repeat back what it is you are hearing, to ensure the person is being accurately understood (i.e., “It sounds like you are feeling frustrated because...”). ✓ Summarize your conversation to allow for clarification as needed.
<p>Respond with Compassion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Be aware of your verbal and non-verbal response to the person’s feelings (i.e., tone of voice, eye contact, facial expression). ✓ Provide validation (i.e., “I can understand why you would feel that way”). ✓ Collaborate with the person to identify how to best support the way they feel. 3 Encourage self-advocacy or advocate for the person according to identified solutions. ✓ Provide person appropriate health literacy tools.

Regardless of diagnosis, empathy is a crucial skill that all caregivers should embody in order to provide patients the respect and compassion they deserve.

Moudatsou, M., Stavropoulou, A., Philalithis, A., & Koukouli, S. (2020). The Role of Empathy in Health and Social Care Professionals. *Healthcare (Basel, Switzerland)*, 8(1), 26. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare8010026>