



## Empathy Moments

Because of the uniquely profound quality of **empathy**, we can put ourselves in other people's shoes which can serve as a strong source of motivation to want to help others. Because of empathy we may not need to experience something ourselves in order to be able to try to understand how something feels. Sometimes just having the desire to try to understand someone's pain can be enough to be with that person and support them through their pain or suffering. Empathy therefore in many ways is an essential and beautiful human quality.

Nevertheless, empathy isn't always easy and it doesn't always come naturally in every situation. Interestingly, every now and then every person eventually has an unexpected occurrence in their life that can serve as a real "empathy moment". You know you are having an empathy moment when you find yourself thinking "So this is how \_\_\_\_\_ (name) felt when he/she was going through \_\_\_\_\_ (difficult experience)".

### **Examples:**

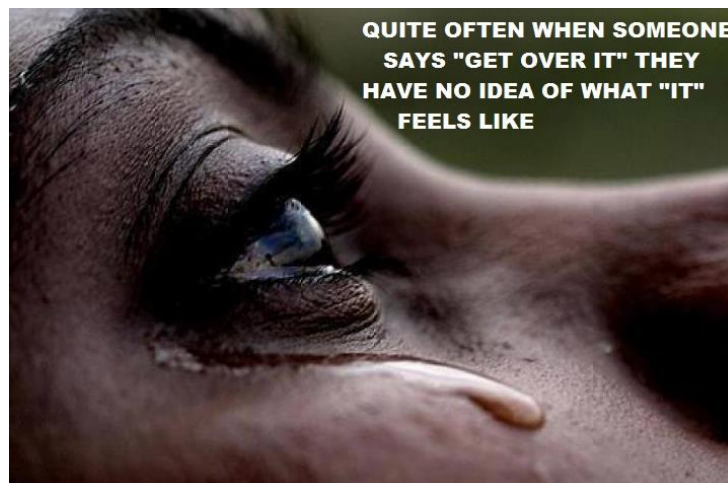
- When someone who steals, cons and rips others off ends up getting ripped off by someone even more clever
- When the cheater one day gets cheated on
- When someone grows up the big shot who looks down on and bullies others one day ends up on the other end of being bullied and looked down upon as an adult
- When the person who lets everyone know that they have all the answers ends up completely lost, confused and alone, not knowing where to turn
- When the person who says "just get over it" experiences something that he or she just can't get over

### **Empathy moments group discussion:**

Think about your own "empathy moments" when something happened in your life that really opened your eyes to how others in that situation feel.

Empathy is such a helpful human quality that can really build bridges between people in different situations with different backgrounds and experiences. Think about and discuss the positive benefits that can come about when there is empathy and understanding among people.

How can you as an individual increase in your ability to try to understand and empathize with others?





## Empathy Moments Activity:

**Directions: First.** Try to come up with an answer for each situation below using your own personal experiences. If you have not had an experience that helped you to understand one of the situations listed below then check IDK (“I Don’t Know”) for that situation indicating that you have not had a significant personal experience in that area. Discuss each one as a group, sharing your experiences to the degree that you are comfortable with. (This exercise ends on a more positive note later)

I really knew what it was like to experience physical pain when: IDK \_\_\_

A time in my life when I understood what it was like to experience loss was: IDK \_\_\_

I really understood what it was truly like to experience fear when: IDK \_\_\_

A time in my life when I realized I was not in control was: IDK \_\_\_

A situation in life where I truly felt trapped was: IDK \_\_\_

I will never forget how much it hurt emotionally when: IDK \_\_\_

I understood what it was like to be left out and excluded when: IDK \_\_\_

A time in my life when I felt people treated me like I was different was: IDK \_\_\_

I learned what it was like to be poor or at a disadvantage when: IDK \_\_\_

I experienced serious disappointment when: IDK \_\_\_

I really knew what it was like to feel deep anger when: IDK \_\_\_

A time when I felt weak, confused or vulnerable was: IDK \_\_\_

*Add your own example of a difficult experience to discuss:* \_\_\_\_\_

## Next:

When the group is done discussing the above situations and feelings, review some of the situations which you checked IDK (“I Don’t Know”) – **For people who checked IDK, discuss what you learned from listening to others in the group about their experiences. What experiences of others in the group stood out to you?**



**Finally: Ending on a Positive Note** - One more time identify and share your personal experiences but this time focus on some positive and encouraging thoughts and memories:

**I knew what it was like to feel proud when:**

**I felt a deep sense of happiness in my life when:**

**I experienced a sense of belonging when:**

**A time in my life when I felt strong was:**

**I can remember feeling a sense of hope when:**

**A time in my life when I truly felt love was:**

**An experience I can remember when I felt deep gratitude was:**

**A situation in my life that brought me joy was:**

**I can recall feeling a sense of contentment or satisfaction when:**

**I felt cared for (or cared about) when:**

**A time when I felt serenity and peace was:**

**A happy memory that I will never forget is:**

**Add your own example of a positive experience to discuss:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Closing Education & Discussion: How does someone build empathy?** Building empathy takes patience and self-awareness. Review and discuss the following aspects of empathy-building and think about how you can make improvements in each area: **INCREASING EMPATHY INVOLVES:**

- **Really taking the time hold off on our own opinions in order to first listen to others with a view to understanding their experiences and feelings, (even when we do not agree with them)**
- **Visualizing, contemplating and imagining what it must feel like to be in “other people’s shoes”**
- **Adjusting your attitude to avoid automatically assuming that you are right by taking time to consider the other sides of the story or issue. Increasing in the ability to be objective, open minded and unprejudiced (to the degree that we are able to)**