



“I Feel Like No One Understands...”

Have you ever been in a unique and challenging situation that caused you to feel like no one really understood what you were going through? Just about everyone has had that feeling at one time or another. One of the beautiful things about group therapy is that being involved in a cohesive group program provides an opportunity for group members to share their individual experiences with others who can respond with **empathy**.

Besides love and compassion, empathy is one of the most powerful factors when it comes to connecting with other human beings in a positive manner. Empathy involves shared thoughts, feelings and attitudes, even when personal experiences and backgrounds may be different. Empathy is like a bridge that connects one person to another through identification and understanding.



Three quick but key points for showing and experiencing empathy: Empathy comes more naturally to some people than others. Here are a few things to focus on when showing empathy:

1. **Suspend interpersonal judgement** – When empathizing with another person, judging that person’s actions can get in the way of understanding. Temporarily forget about whether or not you agree or disagree with what that person did when trying to empathize.
2. **Focus on their heart and mind, not your own** – When showing empathy, forget about how you imagine that you would think and feel in that person’s situation based on your experience and focus more on how that individual must have thought and felt from their perspective (which may be completely different than how you would feel in the same situation)
3. **Imaginatively get into the other person’s world** – Allow the other person’s point of view, circumstances and experiences to take you out of your own head and into their world, seeing and feeling things from their point of view and frame of reference as best that you can imagine





Showing Empathy Group Exercise:

Think about the title of this page: “**I feel like no one understands...**” Take a few minutes to think about a situation in your life which can be difficult to understand. Take turns sharing your situation one person at a time and allow your group members to try to show you empathy by responding according to the following rules for listeners:

Listen but:

- ❖ Don't give advice
- ❖ Do not focus on whether you agree or disagree
- ❖ Do not explain how you think the situation should have been handled differently
- ❖ Try to focus on **empathetic responses**, (Some examples below)
 - “I understand how you feel when you said...”
 - “That really sounds...”
 - “I hear what you are saying and...”
 - “That seems like it must be very...”
 - “I can identify with what you said about....”

Alternate Empathy Group Exercise – The Empathy Game

The previous empathy activity may be better for sharing deeper, more sensitive situations with one another as a group. Because this version is structured in a game format, it may be better to avoid overly deep or sensitive topics.

Directions: One person should share an interesting life situation or story that others can be used for others to try to display empathy and understanding. After explaining the story another group member should volunteer to take the **empathy challenge** by responding to that story with as much empathy as possible. Finally, the original person who shared the story should rate the other group member's ability to show empathy using the following scale:

- 1 – Minimal:** *The group member showed very little empathy about your story*
- 2 – Moderate:** *The person showed some empathy and understanding but could have done better*
- 3 – Good:** *The group member showed a good amount of empathy*
- 4 – Excellent:** *You truly felt like the person who showed empathy really understood you on a deep level*
- 5 – Amazing Empathetic Connection:** *That person truly displayed exactly what it is like to walk in your shoes*

Keep on taking turns where one person shares a story and the other takes the empathy challenge and see how people do overall with showing empathy and understanding

Closing Discussion

- Do you feel like empathy comes naturally to you or do you need to work on it?
- What are some of the benefits of learning empathy (how can empathy make you better?)
- What can you focus on going forward today to try to be a more empathetic person?