



# Empathy

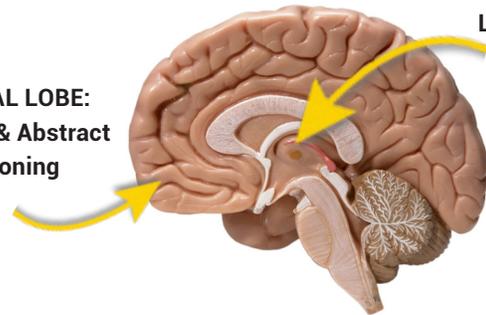
## Definitions & Discussion Questions

**Empathy:** Predicting how others may feel or think even if you have not had the same experiences; more feeling than thinking; feeling what the other person is feeling; acting out of consideration for how others feel. We use empathy when we put ourselves in someone else's shoes.

**Sympathy:** Understanding another person's feelings; more thinking than feeling. We use sympathy when we express feeling sorry or bad for someone.

**'Silverlining It':** Brené Brown uses the term 'silverlining it' to describe when people try to solve or lessen the impact of someone's difficulties. These types of responses begin with 'but' or 'at least'. As Brené says, "Rarely can a response make something better, what makes something better is connection." So instead of silverlining it, be in the discomfort and say, 'I don't know what to say, but I am here for you.'

**FRONTAL LOBE:**  
Empathy & Abstract Reasoning



**LIMBIC SYSTEM:**  
Emotional Reactions

**Higher Level Executive Functioning:** Empathy is a higher level executive functioning skill that starts to deepen when our brain enters the second phase of brain development around age 11/12. This is when our brain begins to engage abstract reasoning instead of concrete or all or nothing thinking. Abstract reasoning skills allow us to imagine what other people are thinking and feeling even when we have never experienced what they are going through.

### Critical Thinking Section

#### Students:

- On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the best, how empathic are you?
- How do you know when expressing empathy is a good idea?
- Do you get anxious or feel awkward when other people are going through tough times because you do not know what to say or how to act?
- What things are not helpful to hear from others when you are going through a tough time?
- How do you want others to react toward you when you need empathy?
- Can you feel the difference when someone is showing you empathy versus sympathy?
- What is your favorite way to show empathy?

#### HOW TO INCREASE EMPATHY SKILLS:

- Remember the 'Use It or Lose It' principle! The more you use the executive functioning skills of the frontal lobe, the stronger the neuronal network for those skills becomes. Empathy is one of the most important executive functioning skills. So, practice this Three Step Method to build empathy skills:
1. Cognitive Empathy: Put yourself in the other person's shoes. Imagine what they are thinking and feeling in their situation.
  2. Emotional Empathy: Feel the emotions you imagined them to be feeling. Show them that you are feeling right along with them. Crying with them is okay!
  3. Behavioral Empathy: Be with the other person while feeling with them. Talking or doing something is not necessary, but offering a hug or thanking them for telling you is enough.

#### Staff & Family:

- How do you model good empathy to your students or kids?
- Are you naturally good at showing empathy, or do you have to work at it?
- What is it like when someone shows you empathy? How about sympathy?
- Have your empathic skills improved with age? Why or why not?
- What are your favorite ways to show empathy to students, parents, coworkers, or other adults?
- What things irritate you when others show you empathy or sympathy?
- What are your favorite things to say when showing empathy to someone who is going through grief, loss, fear, or disappointment?