

Types of Empathy	What is it?	High Empathy	Average Empathy	Low Empathy
Cognitive Empathy	<i>The ability to understand another person's perspective or mental state</i>	A therapist accurately interprets a client's thoughts and feelings.	A friend recognizes when someone is upset but isn't sure why.	A person struggles to comprehend why someone is hurt by a comment.
Emotional Empathy	<i>The capacity to feel what another person is feeling or emotionally resonate with them</i>	Crying when seeing someone else cry in a movie	Feeling sad when a friend shares bad news	Feeling detached when others express stress emotions
Compassionate Empathy	<i>The drive to take action or help someone in distress based on understanding and feeling their experience</i>	Immediately offering support and resources when seeing someone in need	Checking in with a friend who seems down and offering to help if needed	Not noticing or feeling compelled to help when others are struggling
Somatic Empathy	Physically mirroring or feeling another person's physical sensations	Feeling stomach pain when hearing someone describe their stomachache	Slight discomfort when witnessing someone get hurt	No physical reaction to others' physical pain or sensations
Self Empathy	The ability to understand and care for one's own emotional and mental state	Regularly checking in with personal emotions and needs and acting on them	Taking breaks when feeling overwhelmed but sometimes pushing through	Ignoring personal needs and pushing through exhaustion or distress

5 Common Misperceptions about Empathy

❌ 1. High empathy means better relationships.

Reality: Excessive emotional empathy can lead to burnout or emotional overwhelm, making it hard to maintain boundaries in relationships. Conversely, individuals with lower empathy may maintain healthier relationships by setting firm boundaries and approaching conflicts more objectively.

❌ 2. Compassionate empathy requires feeling the same emotion as the other person.

Reality: Compassionate empathy is about understanding and caring enough to take action, even without sharing the same emotional state. In fact, maintaining emotional distance can sometimes enhance the ability to help effectively, as it allows for clearer judgment.

❌ 3. Empathy is a fixed trait.

Reality: While many people lean more toward one end of the spectrum naturally due to neurotype, empathy can often be fine-tuned over time through life experiences and practice. People may shift in their empathy levels depending on circumstances, mental health, and emotional resources.

❌ 4. If you don't feel others' pain, you lack empathy.

Reality: Somatic empathy is just one way to experience empathy. Not everyone has a physical response, but they may show empathy through emotional support or compassionate actions. Empathy is multifaceted, and the absence of one type does not indicate a lack of overall empathy. People may excel in one form of empathy while showing less of another, which is entirely valid.

❌ 5. People who lack empathy are dangerous.

Reality: Empathy alone is not a moral compass. Danger is tied to factors like intent and ethical decision-making. Many individuals with lower empathy lead kind, responsible lives, relying on principles and conscious choices to guide their actions. Likewise, even though high empathy is often associated with compassion, people with high empathy can use their understanding of others' thoughts and emotions for exploitation or manipulation. High empathy doesn't guarantee benevolent intentions, just as low empathy doesn't guarantee malicious ones.