



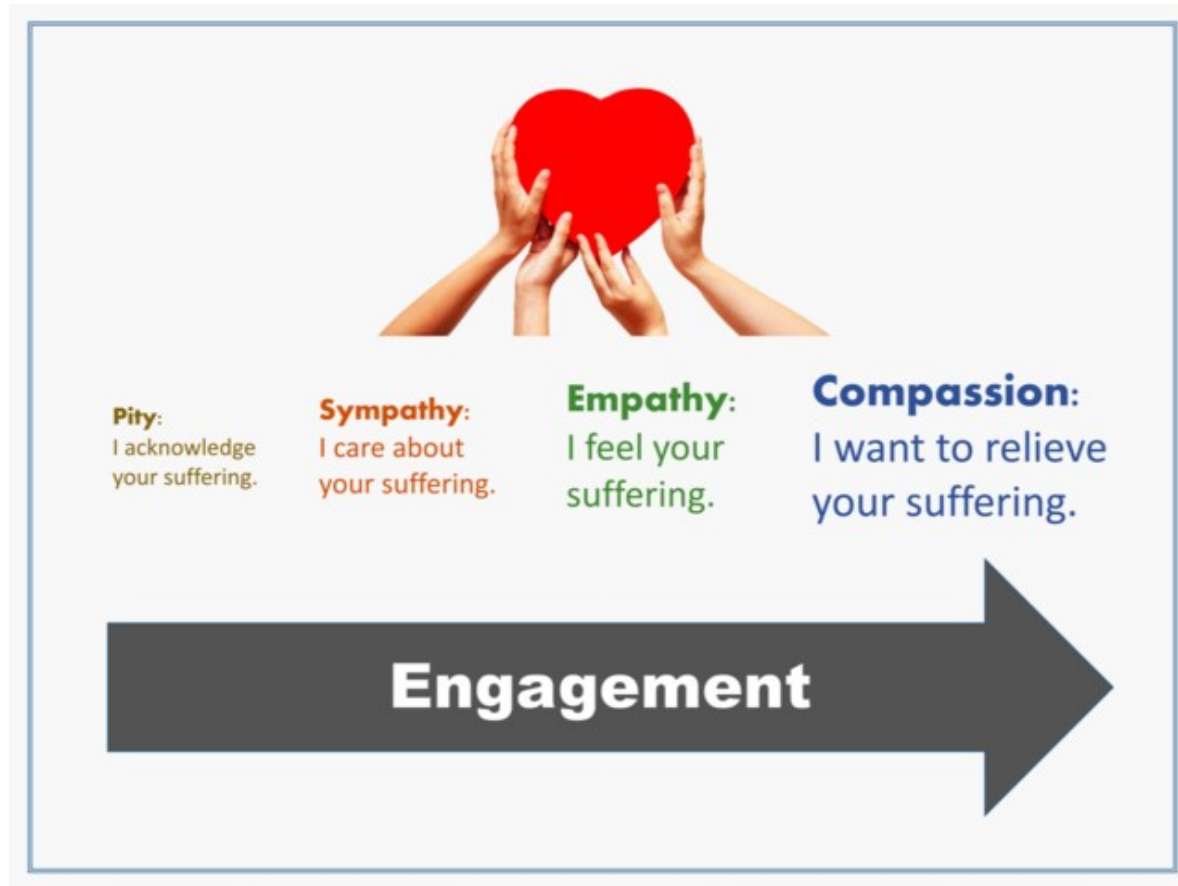
What We Talk About When We Talk About Empathy:

The Power and Limitations of Empathy
in the Battle for Justice

“We are experiencing an unprecedented national attack on empathy. In D.C., we have the least empathetic human among our 315 million citizens. That trickles down.”

— Dave Eggers

Ryan Bort, “A Conversation with Dave Eggers About Trump and the American Empathy Void,” <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/dave-eggers-trump-720729> (last visited April 30, 2019).



Robert Shelton, reproduced in Neel Burton, M.D., “Empathy vs. Sympathy,”
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hidden-and-see/201505/empathy-vs-sympathy> (March 22, 2015),
last visited April 30 2019.

Types of Empathy:

- ▶ Affective, or actual mirroring of others' feelings
- ▶ Cognitive, sometimes called “perspective-taking,” or the ability to predict others' emotional responses
- ▶ Compassionate, triggering additional conduct to alleviate stress or suffering

“What is Empathy?” at <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/empathy/definition>, last visited April 30, 2019; Justin Bariso, “There are Actually 3 Types of Empathy,” <https://www.inc.com/justin-bariso/there-are-actually-3-types-of-empathy-heres-how-they-differ-and-how-you-can-develop-them-all.html> (Sept. 19, 2018), last visited April 30, 2019.

Possible Limitations on Empathy:

- ▶ Affective empathy inherently reflects bias in favor of those like ourselves
- ▶ Affective empathy focuses our attention disproportionately on the plight of particular individuals at the expense of larger groups

See Paul Bloom, *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion* (New York: Ecco, 2016).

Empathic accuracy can be learned. How should it be taught??

- ▶ Experiential learning, risk-taking?
- ▶ Environment of psychological safety and trust
 - ▶ Attunement (“informed empathy”)
 - ▶ Authenticity
 - ▶ Power-sharing

See Erin C. Lain, Racialized Interactions in the Law School Classroom: Pedagogical Approaches to Creating a Safe Learning Environment, 67 J. of L. Educ. 780 (2018); Ashley N. Woodson & Kristen E. Duncan, “When Keeping It Real Goes Wrong: Race Talk, Racial Blunders, and Redemption,” in Christopher C. Martell, ed., *Social Studies Teacher Education: Critical Issues and Current Perspectives*, 101-112, 105 (2018).

Some mindfulness practices include:

Practice	Purpose
Active listening/mirroring of statements	promote better communication without assumptions
Role-playing and reflection	increase awareness of effects on others and similarities/differences among individuals
Self-awareness scan	identify responses at moments of stress (delivery or receipt of bad news)
Awareness and reservation of judgment	Naming of emotions, categorization (with openness, flexibility, multiplicity)
Identification of values	bolster shared values and counteract stereotype threat

Some reflective exercises can include:

Topic	Task
Self-awareness of pleasant or unpleasant feelings or thoughts	Write about/discuss an instance in which you became aware of such feelings/thoughts and about their effect on a communication with a client or decisionmaker
Implicit bias/preconceived idea	Write about/discuss a client encounter, goal, or response that surprised you
Bolstering values	Write about/discuss a meaningful encounter and describe your own personal contribution (what characteristics) to the outcome
Conflict resolution	Write/about discuss a conflict that raised unpleasant feelings or thoughts but resolved positively

Table adapted from Krasner MS, Epstein RM, Beckman H, Suchman AL, Chapman B, Mooney CJ, Quill TE. *Association of an Educational Program in Mindful Communication With Burnout, Empathy, and Attitudes Among Primary Care Physicians*. *JAMA*. 2009;302(12):1284-1293.

2-Way Empathy Mapping?

