



MENTAL HEALTH

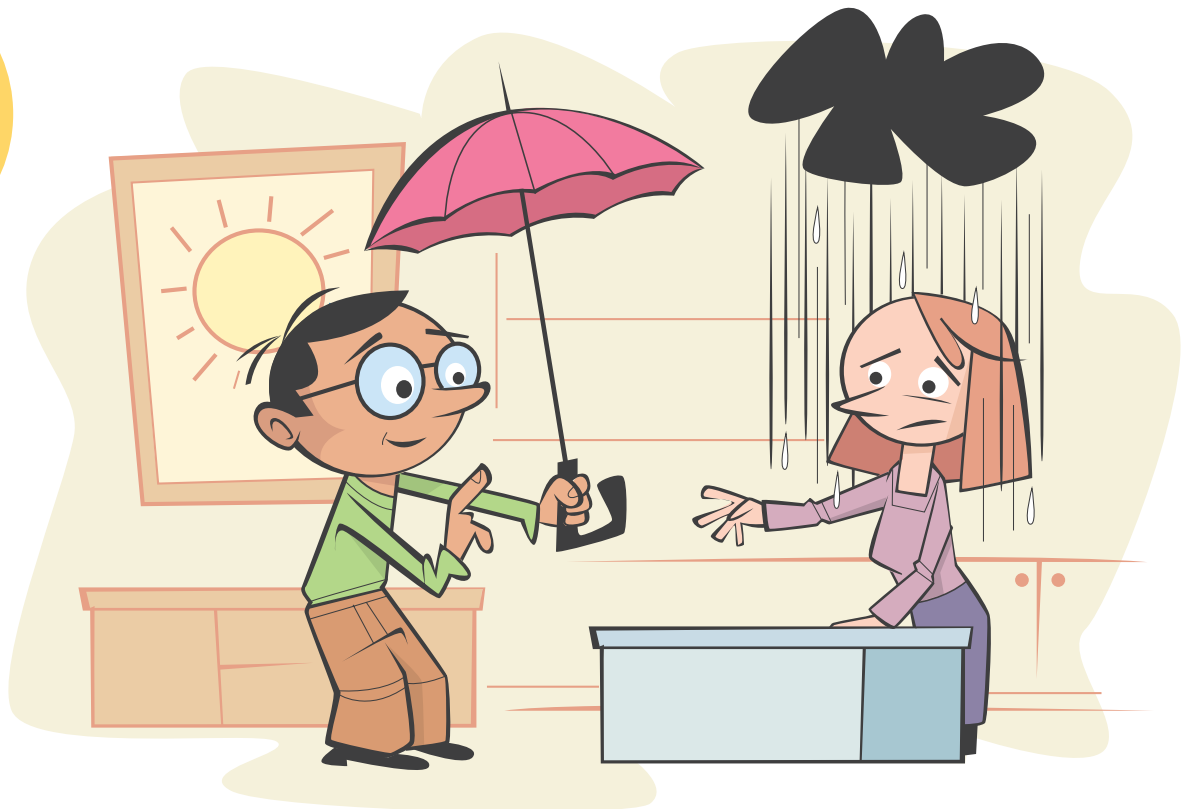
Empathy at work is good for your health!

The terms *empathy* and *sympathy* are often confused; in both cases there is a sense of a close connection between two people. We are interested in the other person and receptive to what they are feeling. Emotions are front and centre.

Being empathetic is being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes and understand what they are feeling without taking on that person's situation. A certain distance is important to protecting your own health and well-being.

Being sympathetic is feeling the same emotions as the other person, sharing their pain and becoming concerned about it as you imagine yourself in their situation. This increases your own level of stress.

This fact sheet is about interactions in the workplace, but the information can also be useful in one's personal life.



Empathy

I understand the other person's feelings
 I make a distinction between that person and myself
 I am objective in dealing with a situation, I remain neutral and I am not influenced by the feelings the other person is experiencing

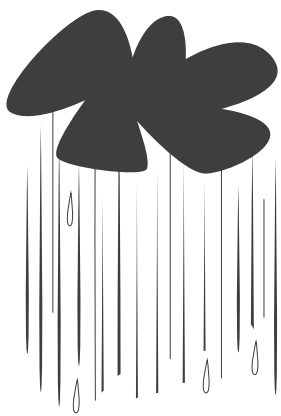
Sympathy

I feel the emotions of the other person
 I identify with that person
 I'm subjective in dealing with the situation, take their side, and am influenced by their emotion to the point that I feel it myself

EXAMPLE | *The person I am visiting at home is very sad; she's just learned she has to move to a senior's residence.*

I understand her sadness and that it will be difficult, but I am not personally sad. I'm being empathetic.

I imagine being in this situation and become sad too. I feel helpless and overwhelmed. I'm being sympathetic.



The downside of being sympathetic

Although the goal is to help someone else, to rescue or protect them, you may find yourself thinking and feeling as if you were that person and getting caught up in their problems. A sympathetic response could cause you to lose your psychological distance, leaving you feeling overwhelmed, powerless, guilty, frustrated or angry, and putting your own health at risk.

Getting caught up in the words or behaviour of others can lead to burnout. When you're feeling sympathetic it's harder to say "no" and set clear boundaries. You may want to go beyond your assigned tasks, which could put your health at risk and increase the chances of injury.

For greater empathy on the job

- Know the role and duties of your job.
- Know and apply the policies and procedures of your department.
- Seek your supervisor's assistance and support regarding work organization.
- Make your client aware of policies and procedures and ask for their cooperation.
- Identify limits on tasks to be accomplished and discuss this with the client.
- Set the boundaries of your relationship with the client.
- Practice saying no, so you can refuse requests that go beyond what has been agreed upon.
- Report situations to your supervisor in which you feel helpless, so you can get the support you need to protect your mental health.
- Reach out to organizations that offer relevant services, so you can refer your client to them in cases where their needs exceed the services your institution can provide.



FOR MORE INFO

Famery, S. (2014). *Le pouvoir de l'empathie : comment obtenir le meilleur et éviter le pire ?* Paris, France : Eyrolles.
 ASSTSAS. (2017). *Formation Réactions sécuritaires Alpha*, Cahier du participant.