



PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

Empathy in the workplace is good for your health!

The terms empathy and sympathy are often confused; in both situations there is a close relationship between the people concerned. We are interested in the other person and receptive to what they are saying. The relationship is emotional in nature.

To be empathetic, is to put yourself in someone else's shoes and to understand the feelings they are experiencing without taking over their situation. In this way we are keeping a necessary psychological distance while preserving our own health (well being).

To be sympathetic, is to feel the same emotions as the other person, to share their suffering and become concerned as we imagine going through their job. In this way we increase our own stress level.

THE EXPRESSION
“A SYMPATHETIC
PERSON” IS USED TO
REFER TO SOMEONE WHO
IS KIND AND PLEASANT.
OF COURSE WE CAN
BE EMPATHETIC WHILE
ALSO BEING KIND
TO SOMEONE.

This technical sheet pertains to interactions in the workplace. The information can be equally useful in one's personal life.



Empathy

We understand the other's feelings
 We make a distinction between ourselves and them
 We are objective in dealing with a situation; we remain neutral.
 We are not influenced by the feelings the other person is experiencing

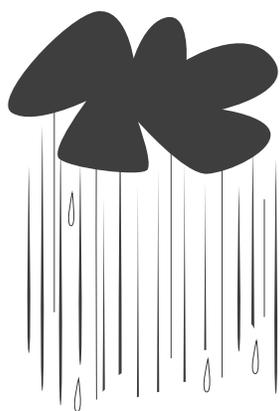
Sympathy

We feel the emotions of the other person.
 We identify with the person.
 We are subjective in dealing with a situation, partial, and influenced by the emotion the other is living through to that point that we feel it ourselves.

EXAMPLE | *The person I am visiting in their home is very sad as they learn they must move to a residence. It is bad news for her...*

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

I imagine going through this situation and become sad. I personally feel helpless and overwhelmed, so I am sympathetic.



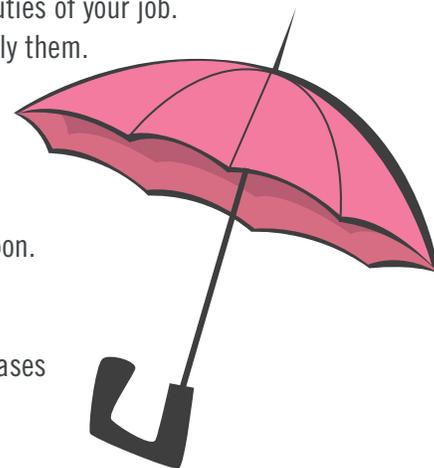
The Possible risks of being sympathetic

With the intention of helping someone else, wanting to save and protect them, we can find ourselves thinking and feeling in their place and caught up in their problems. When we are sympathetic we can lose our professional (psychological) distance, putting our own health at risk and experience feelings of being consumed, overwhelmed, powerless, guilty, frustrated, angry etc.

To let yourself be caught up by the words or behaviour of another can lead to professional burnout. When we are sympathetic we have difficulty in saying “no” and in setting clear boundaries. We can go beyond our set tasks, putting our physical safety at risk and increasing the chance of injury.

To bring about the empathetic approach in the workplace

- Have a sound knowledge of the roles and responsibilities connected to the particular duties of your job.
- Have a sound knowledge of the policies and procedures of your department, and to apply them.
- Ensure the availability and support of your supervisor in work organization.
- Present the policies and procedures to the client and obtain their agreement.
- Identify limits on tasks to be accomplished and discuss this with the client.
- Let the client know the boundaries (limits) of your relationship with them.
- Practice saying no, in order to refuse requests that go beyond what has been agreed upon.
- Report situations to your supervisor in which you feel helpless, in order to get the necessary support to preserve your psychological health.
- Reach out to organizations that offer relevant services in order to inform the client in cases where needs exceed the services provided by the care establishment (organization).



TO KNOW MORE

Sarah FAMERY. *Le pouvoir de l'empathie : comment obtenir le meilleur et éviter le pire ?*, Groupe Eyrolles, 2014.
 ASSTSAS, *Formation Réactions sécuritaires Alpha*, Cahier du participant, 2017.