

EMPATHY

“Empathy is the intention to connect with the feelings and needs of another.

It is the gift of our presence – without judgment, analysis, suggestions, stories, or any motivation to fix the other person.”

Sura Hart

I love the way Sura Hart defines empathy. It's so simple.

The image I often use comes from a Zen story about stepping into a river to accompany another person. Not to rescue, not to pull the other out of the river, certainly not to drown with them, just to accompany them.

Underlying this non-doing, is trust that the other will access his or her own wisdom and the resources to meet her or his needs. There is a deep respect for the other's capacity, and your presence will naturally communicate this.

The person who is receiving the empathy has both spaciousness to explore more deeply as well as the container offered by your presence.

It's likely that the person is feeling seen and is deriving comfort from being understood. They are enjoying the empathic connection. It's also very possible that this moment will lead to more insights in the future. As the one who has 'given' empathy, you don't know what the ultimate results of offering your presence without any judgments or advice will be.

All you have to do is be open to the other person and unobtrusively guess what the person wants in terms of needs. What really matters to them? Then rest in trust.

When I ask you to give each other empathy, please listen and make a guess like *“Are you really wanting to find a way to communicate?”* or *“Are you concerned because you love your grandchildren so much?”*

I remind you that this is not about getting it right. It is also not about getting the person to attain the deepest insight ever. Whatever you offer will be useful in some way, even if the person says, *“Hmm, no it’s not that. . .”*

If you guess a lot of needs, the other person can feel overwhelmed and confused, so be spare and allow room for the other person to discover for themselves needs they hadn’t thought of.

Last reminder, as tempting as it might be to give advice, resist the urge.