

The Self Empathy Process

Self Empathy is a process used in [Nonviolent Communication](#) (or; Compassionate Communication) in which we bring our attention and focus to ourselves and listen with kindness to the feelings and needs arising in us. Self empathy is a valuable tool to learn when we find ourselves triggered and upset by a situation or by the actions of others. It offers us a way of really being in touch with ourselves and what we are longing for and processing our feelings and needs. This process moves away from judgements of other and self as much as possible.

Practicing Self-Empathy

Practicing self-empathy can be very helpful in cultivating inner peace and self-compassion. The practice of self-empathy involves being present with yourself and turning your attention inward by asking yourself four questions:

What am I observing?
What am I feeling?
What am I needing right now?
Do I have a request of myself or someone else?

1. Observation: Identify the event that is causing your distress. For as much as possible, describe the event without including any judgements of yourself or the other.

Example answer: "My dad raised his voice in a conversation we had" (avoid phrasing it like: "my dad was rude when he shouted at me in an argument, he was very unkind", try to describe the scene without judging it.)

Your answer:

2) Feeling: Ask yourself, "When I remember the incident, what am I feeling?". Try to really stick with feelings and don't confuse your feelings with thoughts. I.e: feelings are more simplified straight forward answers like: I feel sad/ concerned/ happy/ down/ low/ joyful. This is not a feeling: "I feel like my dad doesn't care about me" ☹ that is a thought. :) (For a comprehensive feeling list see supplemental PDF).

Example answer: "When my dad spoke to me in the way he did I felt scared, sad, ashamed, angry, upset and confused."

Your answer:

3) Need: Connect that feeling to a need/value that lives in you and ask yourself, "What need is/ was not met?" "What am I needing when remembering this event?" - Don't confuse needs with strategies. Needs are 'life force'; your deep values like: care, understanding, shelter, love, connection, expression, to matter, compassion, to be seen, friendship, support etc. Things like: a car, a job, a pen, food, milk etc are all strategies to meet your needs. They are not needs in this approach. (For a comprehensive needs list see supplemental PDF).

Example answer: "I was feeling scared as I really needed a **safe space** to talk with my dad. I felt sad because needed **connection**, I felt ashamed because I needed **respect**, I felt angry as I needed to be *understood*, I felt upset because I wasn't **connecting/ being seen and understood**. I felt confused because I needed **clarity**. "

Your answer:

4) Give yourself some time to "sit with" these needs and really feel them alive in you and notice how important these needs are to you. Acknowledge to yourself (either to the inner child or you as a grown up) how hard it was for you not to have those needs met in that moment. Honour the unmet needs and simply be with these needs and how they are alive in you when you remember the event.

5) Request: After "sitting with" and acknowledging your needs, do you have any request of yourself or someone else? Choose a doable action request. For instance, you may want to decide to call up and friend and ask them to listen to you while you share your feelings about this event. You may want to ask your friend to only listen and not give advice. Or you may want to ask yourself to take a day or so to do some real fun things for yourself to relax, go to the cinema or go to a spa. You may want to request of yourself to seek professional help/ support, or you may want to create a ritual in memory or acknowledgement of your particular event by lighting a candle and blowing it out.

Example answer: "Having uncovered what was so painful for me about the event I will request a meeting with my father to further discuss the matter (possibly with a mediator there if he's open) so that we can try to create more connection instead of division. And I would like to create a piece of art that is an empathy/ affirmation board, in which I will include some of the unmet needs of this event in the form of a positive affirmation. Eg: if I had an unmet need for understanding, I may include a positive affirmation that says something like: I am whole, I am understood. If I had an unmet need around love, I might include a positive affirmation that says: I am loved. Etc.

Your answer:
