

# EMPATHY

## DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

0-12 months

### 1. EMPATHETIC DISTRESS

Infants react to nearby distress, as if it were their own. One baby cries, the others join in! What do you do? Do you tend to take on other's feelings as your own?



1-6 years

### 2. EGOCENTRIC EMPATHY

Young children start to realize other's distress is not their own. They may use inappropriate means of comfort - for example, a young child of 3 might try to comfort an infant with cookies and hugs, cause the infant more distress.

The type of empathy children use shows what kind of empathy they receive at home. Do you comfort with food, hugs, words of comfort, jokes or distractions? How many times have you found yourself offering advice despite a friend's continued cry to be heard?



6-9 years

### 3. RECIPROCAL EMPATHY

A child's growing cognitive maturity allows for more reciprocal empathy. Though efforts are still centered close to home and school, by this age children are able to understand if their empathy is helpful or not. Think about yourself - are you able to see a situation from the other's perspectives? Do you adapt your responses based on whether they appear helpful?



9-11 years

### 4. GLOBAL EMPATHY

Preadolescent is able to react to the global distress of categories of people - oppression, poverty, world hunger, homelessness, climate change and illness. Before this time, empathy is limited to specific, immediate distresses within child's own life.



11 and up

### 5. CONSCIOUS EMPATHY

This is a mature empathy. It is based on acceptance and love. Love always does the following:

1. Increase security (reduces the fear of loss)
2. Goes from worthy to the worthy
3. Acknowledges free will (people choose their perceptions, thoughts, feelings and actions)
4. Holds an image of others as "good enough"
5. Relies on faith that all is well instead of worry

Conscious empathy involves listening while holding the image of the speaker as capable of handling the emotional upset and situation at hand, as opposed to a victim. Refuse to judge the situation as negative (even if the person is heavily invested in that perception). You hold an accepting space for others so they may process their emotions.

