



Concern  
Healthy & Resilient You

# Wired for We

Use Empathy to Build  
Strong Connections



Human connection is vital to our mental health. We're social by nature, with brains wired to seek belonging, trust, and mutual understanding. Technology is supposed to make those connections easier, but despite the explosion of digital communication options, many of us feel more isolated, misunderstood, and at odds with others, not less.

This disconnect isn't just frustrating, it also harms mental and emotional wellbeing.

Empathy can help us heal that gap.

## It Takes Two

**Empathy is the ability to deeply understand what someone else is feeling and thinking.** It helps us bridge emotional divides to build stronger understanding and deeper relationships.

It might sound like a superpower, but you don't have to be psychic to use it. Empathy is more like a muscle we're all born with, but don't always flex.

As with strengthening any muscle, a good empathy workout starts with understanding how to isolate and train it.

Empathy comes in two forms that work best in partnership: heart empathy and head empathy.



**Heart empathy** kicks in automatically. It's that feeling we get when someone else is crying or laughing, and we start to feel it too. It's quick, instinctive, and powerful.



**Head empathy** is more intentional. It's when we pause and try to see things from someone else's point of view, even if we don't feel what they're feeling.

When we use both, something clicks. Heart empathy helps us care, while head empathy helps us understand. This powerful combination creates meaningful, lasting connections.

## Mirror, mirror, in your brain

If you've ever thought, "This heart and head empathy stuff doesn't come naturally to me," here's some good news: your brain is built to help.

We come equipped with mirror neurons—special brain cells that fire when we see someone doing something and mentally mirror the experience, as if it were happening to us.

## FOR EXAMPLE:



When you see someone smile, your brain lights up like you're smiling too.



If someone stubs their toe, you might wince as if you felt the pain.

The mirror system lays the neurochemical groundwork for empathy. It helps us connect emotionally but can't do all the heavy lifting without help.

Like any natural talent, empathy grows with intentional, frequent use. By regularly flexing our empathy, we reinforce the brain pathways that support understanding and connection, and help it become second nature.

### Work it out

Empathy isn't something you either have or don't. It's a skill everyone can build with a little practice. Here are six effective ways to pump up your empathy muscles:



**Listen like you mean it** – [Giving someone your full attention is a key way to engage empathy.](#)

When someone is speaking, put the phone down, offer nonverbal cues to show you're listening, pause before jumping in, and ask follow-up questions to show you care.



**Try on their perspective** – Before jumping to conclusions about someone you disagree with, pause and imagine their point of view to engage your head empathy. One helpful trick: write out their perspective using *I* statements, like *I believe...* or *My experience shows...* For

example, if a teammate seems disengaged during meetings, you might write: *I work best when I have time and quiet to process information. Since I get overwhelmed when put on the spot, it's better for me to review things on my own before sharing my thoughts.*



**Mix up your conversations** – There's real power in connecting with people whose lives and backgrounds differ from ours. If that feels uncomfortable, ask yourself why. [Bias checks may be uncomfortable](#), but a little self-reflection is a small price to pay to build stronger bonds with folks from other cultural, ethnic, or racial backgrounds.



**Play Name that Emotion** – In a public space, take a moment to observe people's facial expressions or body language and guess how they might be feeling. This sharpens heart empathy. Bonus points if you try imagining their perspective afterward.



**Ask why, not what** – Empathy grows when we choose curiosity over judgment. When someone does something frustrating, instead of thinking "So rude! What's wrong with them?" ask, "I wonder why they're acting like this? Did something happen that I don't know about?"



**Make micro connections** – Small empathetic gestures go a long way. Smile at a stranger. Send a quick message to someone just to say you're thinking of them. [Leading with gratitude](#) is an awesome way to build connections and boost your mood at the same time.

You might not always have time for a full workout, but small daily reps of empathy can make a big difference. The more we flex both head and heart, the more we build the kind of connections that leave everyone feeling seen, heard, and valued.

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