

# Benefits of an Empathy Circle

A shared Google Doc for Collaborative work on articulating the Benefit of Empathy Circles.

Here we create the full list of benefits

**Version 3:** Short link: <http://j.mp/2JawO5T>

## Benefits of an Empathy Circle

### Implementation

- **Easy to Do**  
Do it anywhere and anytime.
  - **Free:** It requires no money investments whatsoever. Do not need to take expensive trainings.
  - **Easy to learn and teach:** The basic practice is easily learnable. With a short instruction, 2 or more people can begin within a few minutes.
  - **Multiple purposes:** It can be used for personal goals like solving a conflict in families, or it can be used as a facilitation tool etc.
  - **Most benefit for least amount of effort:** Get significant results in the minimal amount of time.
  - **Multiple contexts:** A circle can be started quickly in any context: family, friends, work, community, school, churches, book clubs, politics, etc.
  - **Anyone can do it:** No requirements, special training or prerequisites.
- **Easy to Reproduce**  
An Empathy Circle can be easily implemented which means they can spread rapidly.
- **A Gateway Practice**  
The Empathy Circle is a gateway or foundation for many other practices or processes such as: Counseling, Nonviolent Communication, Focusing, Dynamic Facilitation, Motivational Interviewing, Mediation, Human Centered Design, etc.
- **Easy to Build On**  
The Empathy Circle can be expanded on. Like a container it can be strengthened.  
For example, you can build on the Empathy Circle by adding different exercises such as intention setting, check in, at the beginning of a circle.

### Personal Benefits

- **It Feels Good**  
It feels good to be heard and understood by others. Some people say it feels like a weight off their chest. They feel freer and lighter. May feel a sense of openness, forward motion or creativity.  
  
Carl Rogers said, "When someone really hears you without passing judgment on you, without trying to take responsibility for you, without trying to mold you, it feels damn good. . . . When I have been listened to and when I have been heard, I am able to re-perceive my world in a new way and to go on. It is astonishing how elements which seem insoluble become soluble when someone listens. How confusions which seem irremediable turn into relatively clear flowing streams when one is heard. "  
Carl Rogers, Experiences in Communication
- **Nurtures an Empathic Way of Being**  
You become more open, authentic, caring, trusting, grounded, stronger, and able to see the humanity of everyone. It enhances the quality of life and overall well-being.
- **Skill Building: Builds Active Listening and Empathy Skills**
  - Empathy is a skill that can be learned and needs to be practiced, an Empathy Circle gives you a structure to do it.
  - There are a lot of benefits of empathy, more about the benefits of empathy [can be found here](#).

- **Builds “Courage Building” skills**
  - Learning skills like: communication, reflective listening, empathic listening, cognitive, conflict management, emotional intelligence, etc.
- **Build closer relationships**

Develop trustful and deep relationships with empathy circle participants and others.
- **Become part of an Empathy Circle Community**

A place to feel you belong and have fellowship.
- **Bring clarity**

Get a clear understanding of your own and others' perspectives.
- **Share and purge in a safe space**

A place to safely 'purge' your pent up feelings. When participants come into a circle, they often have a pent up need to express themselves and feel heard and seen. The circle offers a space for that.
- **Allow space for creative solutions**

Once participants feel heard and seen, they feel more space for creative thought. They are able to create their own solutions.
- **Supports Democracy**

In an authoritarian relationship one or more people dominate the conversation and attention. One or more people get heard while the others keep quiet. In an empathy circle each person (no matter their political views) has a chance to express themselves and be heard to their satisfaction which supports a democratic mindset and way of being.
- **Quiet, Shy or Introverted People Get a Chance to be Heard**

In the back and forth of typical conversation, the extroverts or more aggressive can dominate a dialogue. It may be hard for quieter or shy people to find a way into the conversation. The Empathy Circle practice can help the quieter people to get equal time to speak and feel heard.
- **Lot of Involvement**

Because the empathy circle is with a small group of participants, each person gets more active involvement as both a speaker and listener.
- **Practice Both Sides of an Empathic Relationship - Speaking and Listening**

When, just being listened to by a therapist or counselor, a person experiences or practices just one side of an empathic relationship. That is the speaking side of empathy. In a therapeutic setting the client doesn't practice the listening side.

A therapist is not supposed to be the speaker with the client being the empathic listener. In an empathy circle one learns to listen as well. Also, one learns a process that can affect the way they relate to others, and can introduce and facilitate the practice with others.
- **Resolves conflict in the early stages: (Preventative, before it escalate)**

**Helpful in Potentially Contentious Dialogues**

The process is helpful in potentially contentious dialogues. For example, people may shy away from dialogue with people across the political or social divides in fear that it will turn into a shouting match. The empathy circle process slows down the dialogue and can help keep shouting matches from happening. An experienced facilitator also helps.
- **Resolves Conflict**

An existing conflict can be brought into an Empathy Circle and it can be talked out and possibly resolved. There are tools and practices that can be added that create an even stronger container for mediating conflicts.
- **Fosters Deeper Self Awareness**

It builds a deeper understanding of my own experience and others' experiences.
- **Fosters and Supports Fairness**

In the circle everyone has time to speak and be heard. It creates a feeling of fairness and equality.

- **Holds Any Topic**  
Any topic can be addressed. Personal support issues, conflicts, team building.

## **SORT AND IN DEVELOPMENT**

- **Speaker Clarity:**  
Participants consistently report that the process of speaking and being reflected back clarifies their own thinking.<sup>19</sup> The act of articulating thoughts for another person, and then hearing them repeated, helps to externalize and structure those thoughts. This process is described as providing a form of "binocular vision," where having one's thoughts seen through two sets of eyes adds depth and a new perspective.<sup>15</sup> This benefit challenges the notion that empathy is a purely emotional capacity, positioning the practice as a tool for enhancing rational thought.<sup>22</sup>
- **Fostering Connection and Trust:**  
The process of mutual, non-judgmental listening is a powerful engine for community building, nurturing connection, and developing deep, trust-based relationships.<sup>11</sup> It creates what participants describe as a sense of "empathic intimacy" and a feeling of safety that allows for greater openness and authenticity.<sup>22</sup>

### **Conflict Resolution:**

The Empathy Circle is explicitly positioned as a tool for resolving interpersonal and intergroup conflict.<sup>5</sup> By creating a structure where opposing parties can finally hear each other's perspectives without the need to defend or rebut, it can defuse tension, bridge divides, and transform unproductive conflict.<sup>5</sup> The stated goal is not necessarily agreement, but mutual understanding and connection, which creates the necessary foundation upon which resolution can be built.<sup>8</sup>

### **Fosters Mutual Understanding**

Grasp the meaning  
Participants begin to understand each other.  
Can see each other's stories, experiences, feelings and needs.  
Understand why people do what they do.  
What their experiences are.

### **Breaks Down Stereotypes.**

### **Supports Civil Dialogue**

### **EC Benefit: Empathy Circle supports maintaining one's sense of self and identity around other people or in community.**

Sometimes it is a struggle to maintain one's sense of self and identity when being around other people or in a community.

**Sofia Bayo Describes it this way,** “One of the things that im actually struggling a lot with, is finding a sense of identity when im around people. I believe that if somebody wants to describe me or even just wants to override my feelings, they must be right. Nowadays im mostly aware of the guilt and fear that I feel around people, but I still have strong reactions. I still need to find better ways to stay with myself around others..

These empathy circles has actually taught me, that I can keep my sense of self, when im interacting with others. Somebody can reflect, and i can make adjustments. I don't have to fall prey to another person's reflections of me. Even though we mostly discuss political issues, im getting so much out of it on a personal level. I can agree, not

agree, be passionate or bored. I can say no if i don't wanna be an active listener, i can go if im tired. It doesn't really matter. Everything is heard.”

### **Models and Builds a Culture of Empathy**

Our vision is to build a culture of empathy. This is a culture where everyone feels like they have a voice. Everyone feels they belong and are welcome. Where everyone sees the common humanity of all people. Where trust is built and collaboration and teamwork to address everyone's needs are manifest. The Empathy Circle structurally models this culture.

### **Since Empathy Circles strengthen empathy, all these benefits apply**

More [benefits of empathy can be seen here](#)

### **A Practice, Practice, Practice (Martin, Bill)**

The empathy circle is a way to practice constructive listening, empathy, dialogue, relational and communication skills and attitudes. Like any capacity it takes time and practice to get better at it. The neurons that fire together wire together. The neural pathways also get stronger when practiced over time. So the capacity for being empathic becomes more deeply ingrained and easier. So a regular empathy circle practice is needed in an ongoing way and the empathy circle is a good routine for that.

### **A Preventative, Prophylactic and Precautionary Practice**

Head of personal problems before they happen. Head off relational problems and conflicts before they happen.

### **The Structure Forces You to Listen Better. (Dave)**

Because you must reflect what the speaker said, you have to listen attentively and carefully. You can not be doing things that typically make people poor listeners. For example, you cannot be thinking about your response while the other person is speaking, be distracted, be thinking of what you are going to say, be looking to interject yourself, etc. etc. You also can practice giving a clear reflection without inserting innuendo, insinuation, or oblique comments.

### **You Learn to Speak More Clearly. (Dave)**

You learn how to make yourself understood more clearly and effectively. People who are long winded or speak in complicated abstract concepts, see how this may be difficult for the listener to hear and understand. This helps you see how to speak in a way that people can more easily comprehend and grasp what you are saying.

### **Fosters Equality - Nobody Can Dominate. (Dave)**

Everyone gets a chance to speak and it is hard for anyone to dominate the conversation. Everyone that speaks gets to be fully heard to their satisfaction. So it nurtures a greater sense of equality.

### **You Will Learn Something New. (Dave)**

Empathy circles help participants go beyond what they already know.

### **Quiet Voices can be Heard (April)**

The Typically Quiet Voices can be heard equally with the more assertive voices

### **Is the Foundation of Team Building and Teamwork**

A study by Google found...

Collaboration skills

Developing Constructive Dialogue Skills

Deepen Your Empathy - which has Many Benefits.

For Personal Support

A Fall Back Point

A group, family or team and practice using the empathy circle. Then when they communicate with ‘normal’ conversation, and the conversation starts to break down, someone can request that Empathic listening is used for the communication.

Most mileage with the least amount of effort.

- This one skill is foundational to a lot of other practices
- This one skill will take you a long way.
  - Listening better,
  - apply if for support,
  - for conflict, etc

Transformation of Consciousness

The relational consciousness of the participants changes and deepens.

in brief they are

- **1. Preventative painful feelings:** emotions like loneliness, alienation, depression, etc.
- **2. Heals painful feelings:** when people are in these states, mutual empathy heals
- **3. Preventative conflict:**
- **4. Heals Conflict,** the empathy circle can support working it out by hearing each person.
- **5. Support Creative** action. Examples
- (however, the experience in an empathy circle can be difficult in different ways. Need to address that. It takes time. People may be busy. )

Feeling heard is good for our physical health.

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Team Building:

Can be used to build more effective teams.

here is article about the importance of empathy in team building.

<http://www.thesmartmanager.com/cover-story/it-pays-to-listen.html>

Team members use empathic listening to build a more effective team. Mentions the research by Google and the empathic listening process.

Learning, Practicing and Deepening Empathic Listening - Active Listening.