

Empathy Edge Course Workbook



Impact of
Empathy



Welcome to Your Empathy Edge Workbook

Empathy is an essential part of excellent medical care. When healthcare professionals demonstrate empathy, patients feel safer, more comfortable, and more willing to communicate and cooperate. This connection can make care easier to provide, reduce complications, and contribute to better outcomes.

As a brain surgery patient who experienced firsthand both the vulnerability of being a patient and the profound impact of compassionate care, I bring a unique perspective to this course. I understand how much the way we communicate, listen, and respond can shape a patient's experience.

Throughout the Empathy Edge course, I'll share real patient stories, introduce practical empathy challenges you can apply in your own work, and encourage you to reflect on your interactions with patients. My goal is to help you strengthen your empathy skills and recognize the difference even small actions can make.

Use this workbook to make your learning personal and practical. After each section of the course, record your reflections, consider what you've learned, and identify ways to put those insights into action. Be honest with yourself, stay curious, and approach each exercise as an opportunity to grow.

Remember, empathy isn't just a feeling. It's an action—and every interaction is an opportunity to make a difference.

First Impressions

Learn to look beyond the first glimpse to discover the whole person.



Think of a time when **you were the patient.**

It could be a recent experience or one from years ago.

Who was a healthcare professional you trusted?

What did that person do that made you feel:

Seen?

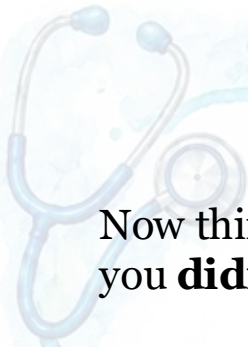
Heard?

Respected?

Safe?

Write down 2–3 specific behaviors you remember.





Now think of a healthcare interaction in which you **didn't feel understood or heard.**

What happened?

How did that affect your behavior?

- ☐ I asked fewer questions
- ☐ I shared less information
- ☐ I became frustrated
- ☐ I stopped listening
- ☐ I didn't follow through on a recommendation
- ☐ I looked for another provider
- ☐ Other: _____

Then:

What could that healthcare professional have done differently that might have changed your response?



Looking Beyond the Diagnosis

*Discover the story beneath
the diagnosis.*



Think of a patient or person you've encountered who was having a difficult time. Maybe they were frustrated, quiet, angry, uncooperative, impatient, or withdrawn.

1. What did you notice?

Write down what you actually saw or heard.

2. What did you initially think was going on?

3. Now imagine there is more to the story.

What are **three things you don't know** about what this person might be experiencing?

4. Get curious.

What could you ask or do differently to learn more before making a judgment?

You don't have to know someone's whole story to recognize that there is more to it than what you can see.



Once again, think of someone you work with who is struggling with something. It could be a patient, student, coworker, or even a family member.

1. What are they struggling to do?

2. What CAN they do?

Identify something they are already able to do, even if it seems small.

3. What might be the next step?

What is one small step beyond what they can do now?

4. How could you encourage them?

Write something you could say or do that would help them believe the next step is possible.

Sometimes empathy means seeing a possibility in someone before they can see it in themselves.



Communicating with Compassion

*Every conversation is an
opportunity to heal.*



Rewrite each response to preserve the essential message while making it clearer, more respectful, and more compassionate.

Scenario A: A delayed appointment

A patient has been waiting for a long time and asks when the provider will arrive.

Healthcare professional: "I don't know. We're really busy today. You'll just have to wait."

Rewrite the response:

Scenario B: An unfamiliar procedure

A patient asks why a test is necessary.

Healthcare professional: "It's standard procedure. We do this for everyone."

Rewrite the response:

Scenario C: A patient who needs more explanation

A patient looks confused after receiving instructions.

Healthcare professional: "I already explained that."

Rewrite the response:



Imagine being the patient about to undergo an unfamiliar, potentially painful procedure. You may feel anxious because you don't know what to expect or what you will feel.

1. What might make this experience frightening for a patient?

Think beyond the physical discomfort. What might the patient be wondering or worrying about?

2. Why might knowing what to expect make a difference?

How could explaining each step help a patient feel more prepared or change how they experience the procedure?

3. Make communication part of your care.

What is one thing you could do during a procedure to help a patient feel informed and supported, rather than simply expecting them to endure it?



Building Trust & Partnership

*Trust begins when people
feel seen and heard.*



Think about a patient you have cared for recently—or a type of patient interaction you encounter regularly.

See the whole person.

What might this patient be experiencing emotionally, physically, or mentally that you cannot immediately see?

Look at the interaction from the patient's perspective.

What could you do to help this patient feel heard, respected, and involved in their care?

Identify one opportunity.

Think of one specific moment in your interaction with this patient when you could have strengthened the partnership.

What could you say or do differently?

Write one specific phrase, question, or action you could use to build trust in that moment.

Challenge: Over the next week, intentionally use this strategy with at least one patient. Then reflect on what you noticed about the patient's response—and your own experience.



1. See the situation through the parent's eyes.

Imagine being told that your six-month-old baby needs a medical intervention four times a day. What might you be feeling? What questions might be going through your mind before you could even begin to think about how this might affect your child years later?

2. Try a different approach.

Imagine you are the doctor explaining the treatment plan a baby's mom. Write two or three sentences that would help her understand what needs to happen now without overwhelming her with possibilities about the distant future.

Your response should be honest, acknowledge her concerns, and avoid promising an outcome you cannot guarantee.



Challenge: With your next patient, **focus on what they need to understand right now—not everything they might face in the future.**

Sustaining Empathy: Caring for Yourself

*You can't pour from an
empty cup.*



My **GET CHARGED** Plan

We all have difficult days. Instead of expecting yourself to always feel positive, create a personal reminder that can help you find a way forward when things get tough. For each mantra, complete the sentence with something that is meaningful to **you**.

CHA — CHANGE

Focus on what you can change.

When I feel frustrated or overwhelmed, something I can control or change is:

R — RESOURCES

Do the best you can with the resources you have.

A resource I can turn to when I need support is:

A strength, skill, or personal passion I can draw on is:



G — GOALS

Modify your goals, but stay true to yourself.

A goal that might sometimes need to be adjusted is:

Even if I have to modify that goal, I want to stay true to:

D — DIFFICULT

Don't be afraid to try something new and difficult.

Something new or difficult that I would like to try is:

One small step I could take toward it is:

My Personal GET CHARGED Reminder

Of the four mantras, the one I most need to remember is:

When I'm having a difficult day, I will remind myself:

Remember: Caring for yourself isn't separate from caring for others. It helps make sustained empathy possible.



Making Every Interaction Count

*Small moments can make a
lasting difference.*



Imagine a patient rates their pain as a 7 out of 10. You ask a few questions, and they respond, “I don't know. It just hurts. I need it to stop.”

1. Look beyond the number.

What additional information would help you understand the patient's pain and how it is affecting them?

2. Consider your approach.

How might your tone, body language, and choice of questions influence whether the patient feels comfortable describing their pain honestly?

3 Choose your words.

Write one open-ended question or empathetic statement that could help you learn more about the patient's experience without making them feel rushed, judged, or dismissed.

Challenge: The next time you assess a patient's pain, challenge yourself to learn something beyond the number.



Imagine a patient responds sharply when you explain that they must wait longer for care. They interrupt you and say, “Nobody here cares about me!”

1. Notice your first reaction.

What might you feel or be tempted to say in response? How could that reaction affect the interaction?

2. Look beyond the behavior.

What are three possible reasons the patient might be responding this way? Remember, these are possibilities, not assumptions.

3. Change the direction of the interaction.

Write a response that acknowledges the patient's frustration without becoming defensive, making promises you cannot keep, or agreeing with an accusation you cannot verify.



Challenge: The next time a patient's behavior challenges you, pause before reacting. Respond to the person rather than just the behavior.

The Lasting Impact of Empathy

*The ripple of empathy extends
far beyond the moment.*



What seems small to a medical professional may mean everything to a patient. A simple act of kindness or taking time to listen can be remembered for years, just as moments of feeling dismissed or uncared for can.

We may never know what a patient is going through, but we can always choose how we treat them.

1. Consider the impact of a small action.

Think of one small thing a medical professional could do to help a patient feel seen, heard, safe, or cared for. Why might that action mean more to the patient than the professional realizes?

2. Think about your lasting impact.

Imagine a patient remembering an interaction with you years from now. What do you hope they will remember about how you treated them? What could you do to help make that memory a positive one?



Empathy is an action, not just a feeling. And even the smallest action can make a difference that lasts a lifetime.



My Empathy Action Plan

Carry what you've learned into every interaction.

Throughout this course, you've explored ways to look beyond the diagnosis, communicate with compassion, build trust, and make every interaction count. Use this page to identify how you want to put empathy into action.

1. What is one behavior you want to practice more consistently?

- ☐ Listening without interrupting
 - ☐ Looking beyond a patient's behavior
 - ☐ Explaining what to expect
 - ☐ Helping patients feel heard and involved
 - ☐ Responding with patience rather than judgment
 - ☐ Other:
-

2. Your personal reminder

Complete this sentence:

I want my patients to remember that I...

Remember: You may never know how much a small act of empathy means to someone. Make every interaction an opportunity to leave a positive impression.

Notes

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