



Health Workforce Initiative

Hi-Touch Healthcare: The Critical Six Soft Skills

Grab-N-Go Independent Training Module:

Empathy/Caring Behaviors

HEALTH WORKFORCE INITIATIVE STATEWIDE ADVISORY COMMITTEE, CALIFORNIA
COMMUNITY COLLEGES CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM



Empathy/Caring Behaviors

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Empathy/Caring Behaviors

Background Information

Many feel that empathy and sympathy are synonymous. According to the Merriam- Webster dictionary, sympathy is caring about and feeling sorry about someone else's trouble, grief or misfortune.ⁱ The American Nurses Association says the following about empathy: "Empathy is defined as the ability to understand a patient's feelings, understand the situation from the patient's perspective, and communicate this understanding to the patient."ⁱⁱ Another way to think about empathy is to imagine what it is to be like in the other person's shoes.

Empathy is important in healthcare for a couple of reasons. Empathy helps patients build trust with the healthcare profession. As the patient has increased trust, they feel a connection with the patient which then increases compliance. As the patient has increased compliance with the recommendations of their healthcare professionals, the patient has improved outcomes.ⁱⁱⁱ

Instead of considering each patient as an often disoriented human being who is in a strange place and feeling intense emotions, healthcare workers frequently get caught up with pressing tasks, buzzing call bells, or simultaneous needs/requests of the many patients needing care. Despite the overwhelmingly complicated demands on the health care worker, it is essential to emotionally connect with each and every patient. This focus on the affective, or emotional, domain will help the healthcare provider interact with empathy.^{iv}

Empathy is essential in the healthcare setting. This module will define empathy in the healthcare setting and identify ways empathy is strengthened and destroyed. There will be a variety of activities that will help solidify how to build empathy and why it is important.



Training



Overall Goal: This training provides participants with an understanding of empathy and the importance of caring behaviors and will demonstrate how the cultivation of empathy can improve patient outcomes.

WIIFM: What's in it for me? A positive attitude in the workplace is imperative in today's modern healthcare environment. Strengthening empathy for the job and understanding ways to keep the passion alive will maximize job satisfaction and help to create a positive healthcare environment



Materials Provided:

1. Empathy and Caring Behavior PowerPoint
2. Activity # 1 – Empathy Quiz
3. Activity # 2 – Triad Role Play
4. “Empathy Participant Instructions” handout
5. Activity # 3 – Tiffany and Fran Dialogue
6. “Tiffany and Fran Dialogue” handout
7. Activity # 4 – Empathy Case Study
8. Activity # 5 – Picture of Empathy
9. Activity # 6 – Optional Empathy Video



Directions for the Trainer: Activity preparation information is included in this document and/or within the PowerPoint presentation notes. Each PowerPoint slide, as appropriate, includes detailed explanations and instructions for the trainer. As with all Grab-N-Go Modules, you can use it all for a more detailed training, *or simply use one or two of the many activities—a la carte style!*



ACTIVITY #1

Empathy Quiz



Goal: This activity provides an opportunity for participants to examine themselves in regards to empathy. Participants will learn to recognize how they can enhance their ability to be empathetic and improve patient outcomes.



Materials Needed (Quantities vary by how many in the group):

- ☐ Empathy PowerPoint Slide #5



Procedures:

1. Have participants read the questions on the PowerPoint slide. The questions are as follows –
 - a. I often think about other people's feelings.
 - b. I don't make fun of people because I can imagine what it feels like to be in their shoes.
 - c. I listen to others when they share what they're going through.
 - d. I try to understand other people's point of view.
 - e. I am aware that not everyone reacts to situations the same way I do.
2. Have participants read each question and keep track of how many times they answer "yes" and how many times they answer "no."
3. Explain that if participants answer "yes" to most of the questions they are on a good road toward being empathetic. If participants answer "no" to most of the questions, then they should pay particular attention to the module today.



ACTIVITY #2

Triad Role Play



Goal: This activity provides an opportunity for participants to either be in a position where they would benefit from empathy, be able to act with empathy, or give input for improved empathy.



Materials Needed:

- ☐ Empathy PowerPoint Slide #11
- ☐ Copies of the “Empathy Participant Instructions”—one copy per each group of three participants.



Procedures:

1. Have participants form groups of three.
2. Hand out a set of “Empathy Participant Instructions” to each group.
3. Each participant is given a role to play – “Patient,” “Healthcare Worker,” or “Observer.”
4. Allow 3-5 minutes for each person to read the instructions describing his/her role.
5. After participants have read their roles, have them act out the situation.
6. Role Play.
7. After the participants have acted out the scenario, allow discussion where the observer reports out to the small group of three.
8. Small group discussion—reflect on the feedback from the observer.
9. Report out: small groups report out to the large group. Discuss similarities/differences among the groups.



ACTIVITY #2

Triad Role Play

“Empathy Participant Instructions”

Patient – You are a patient that has just been unexpectedly admitted to the hospital. As the patient, you are extremely concerned about things going on at home. These concerns could include small children, teenaged children, an aging parent that they are caring for, pets (dog or cat), their yard that needs attention, bills to pay etc. Besides your domestic worries, you don’t really understand why you have been *admitted* to the hospital. You thought you would have a quick in and out visit and did not prepare for this situation. (Ideas include – angina, positive test results, concern of cancer.)

Healthcare worker – You are respiratory therapist who has come into this patient’s room to set up oxygen as ordered by the physician. You can either choose to try to demonstrate empathy from what you already do in your practice and what you have learned today, or you can intentionally demonstrate ineffective behaviors and be as non-empathetic as you want to be.

Observer – Your role is to just watch and see how you think the patient will feel in this interaction. Do you think s/he feels as if the healthcare worker is empathetic? Why or why not? Do you have suggestions?



ACTIVITY #3

Tiffany and Fran



Goal: This activity provides an opportunity for participants to listen and observe an interaction between two friends and answer questions throughout the interaction to help understand and implement empathy.



Materials Needed

- ☐ Empathy PowerPoint Slides #14 – 15
- ☐ One copy for each participant of the “Tiffany and Fran Dialogue” (found on next page)



Procedures:

1. Distribute copies of the “Tiffany and Fran Dialogue” to each participant.
2. Have three volunteers read the roles of Tiffany and Fran.^v
3. At the conclusion of the dialogue, ask the questions found on slide 15 of the Empathy Power Point.
 - a. What elements of empathy did you notice?
(Does not interrupt, gives advice, changes the subject to her own plans, does not disapprove, attentive to verbal and non-verbal cues, states understanding.)
 - b. What impact did Fran’s empathy have on Tiffany?
(Appreciation for being listened to, increased trust in herself and Fran, feels heard, reduces distress, helps understand her own feelings better, strengthened friendship.)
 - c. How would you have reacted?
(Allow participants to express their reactions and do some self-evaluation to identify ways they could improve.)



ACTIVITY #3

Tiffany and Fran

Tiffany and Fran Dialogue

Narrator: Tiffany and Fran meet for lunch one Friday after not have talked with each other for two months.

Tiffany (*begins talking with delight*): “I saw Ben yesterday. You remember Ben, right? I told you about him last time we met.”

Fran: “Sure. You met him a month before our last lunch and found him attractive.”

Tiffany (*with sparkling eyes*): “That’s right! Since then I’ve learned that he’s good for me. We’ve been seeing a lot of each other lately and getting close. I’m excited!”

Narrator: As Tiffany begins to pour out the details of her recent experiences with Ben, Fran says to herself, I was going to tell her about my vacation plans, but this relationship sounds really important to her. I’ll wait and listen to her news first. Five minutes go by.

Tiffany: “Last Tuesday he told me he loves me! I couldn’t believe it!”

Narrator: Fran has been listening for the entire time but hasn’t said a word.

Fran: “Wow!”

Tiffany: “I still can’t believe it! I didn’t know what to say. I still don’t what to tell him!”

Fran: “I don’t understand. Didn’t Ben expect you to say how you felt about him?”

Tiffany (*face changes from pink to pale and she stops talking*): “I don’t know, but I wanted to say something, and het I didn’t want to. I feel so confused!”

Fran: “It’s hard for you to talk about this.”

Tiffany (*struggling to speak again, she stops and her face turns even paler*): “I didn’t think it would be so hard, but I do want to tell you about it. I uh, do feel strongly about Ben.”

Fran: (*after waiting a few seconds, she gently says*): “And what else?”



ACTIVITY #3

Tiffany and Fran

Narrator: Fran continues to wait quietly for Tiffany to regain her ability to speak. Sixty seconds pass and then Tiffany's jaw tightens as she says,

Tiffany (*jaw tightening*): "I want to tell you how I really feel about him. He's a wonderful man and I'm, uh, I'm very fond him I'm more than fond of him. I . . . uh I . . . uh . . . I love him! There I finally said it! Whew!"

Narrator: As Fran listens to Tiffany open up emotionally, Fran develops a lump in her throat and a warm feeling in her chest. She gulps, pauses to collect her thoughts and softly says . . .

Fran: "It's hard for you to talk about how you feel about Ben."

Tiffany: "Definitely, but now after telling you, I think I am ready to tell Ben. I was starting to think something was wrong with me! I am glad I told you because you didn't criticize me. Your understanding touches me."

Narrator: A few seconds pass, both Fran and Tiffany take a deep breath. Tiffany's faces relaxes and regains color. With affection in her eyes and gentleness in her voice, Tiffany says . . .

Tiffany: "I feel better, thanks for letting me talk."

Fran: (*face brightening*): "Glad to do it! Now I want to tell you about my two-week vacation to Tahiti that I am planning."



ACTIVITY #4

Case Study



Goal: This activity provides an opportunity for participants to observe an interaction between a nurse and a patient and identify changes that can be made to increase empathy.



Materials Needed:

- ☐ Empathy PowerPoint Slide #18



Procedures:

1. As a group, read the case study found on slide 18.
2. Ask the participants the following questions:
 - a. How was empathy used?
 - b. How could the situation been handled differently?
 - c. What was the outcome for the patient? Why?



ACTIVITY #5

Picture of Empathy



Goal: This activity provides an opportunity for participants to draw their new vision of empathy and to explain this vision to the group.



Materials Needed:

- ☐ Empathy PowerPoint Slide #19
- ☐ Piece of paper for each participant
- ☐ Drawing utensils (color crayons or colored pencils to share)



Procedures:

1. Distribute a piece of paper to each participant.
2. Allow a small group of participants to share a package of color crayons or colored pencils.
3. Instruct participants to take into consideration everything they have learned about empathy.
4. Draw a picture that represents empathy to them. There are no limits or rules. If some are hesitant – you may allow them to work in pairs.
5. Allow 5-10 minutes for the pictures to be drawn.
6. Ask for volunteers to show and explain their pictures.
7. Point out any aspects that participants included from today's module.



ACTIVITY #5

Empathy Video (Optional)



Goal: This activity provides an opportunity for participants to watch empathy in action in a healthcare setting.



Materials Needed:

- ☐ Empathy PowerPoint Slide #21
- ☐ Equipment, including audio and video so that participants can see the video



Procedures:

1. Show the video titled “Empathy: The Human Connection to Patient Care”^{vi}
2. Allow for any comments from participants.

Disclaimer – some institutions have already used this video. Each situation and group will vary and will be up to the facilitator if they chose to show it.



References

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