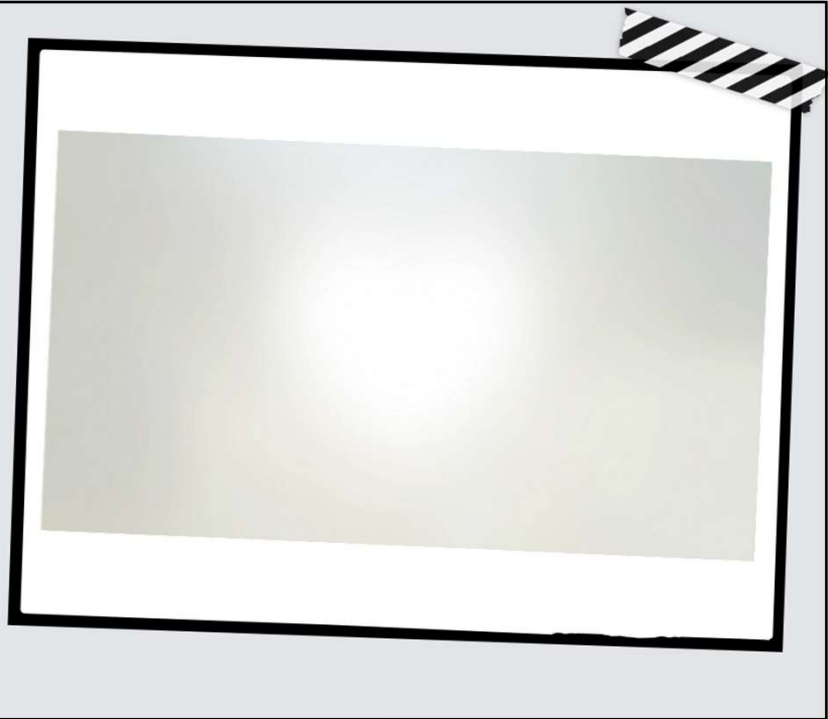


Empathy and the Domestic Violence Victim



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Introduction

20+ years in public safety – Dispatch, Supervision, Policy Development

Personal connection to Domestic Violence

Instructor with SAFVIC for TCPs since 2012

Peer Support since 2013



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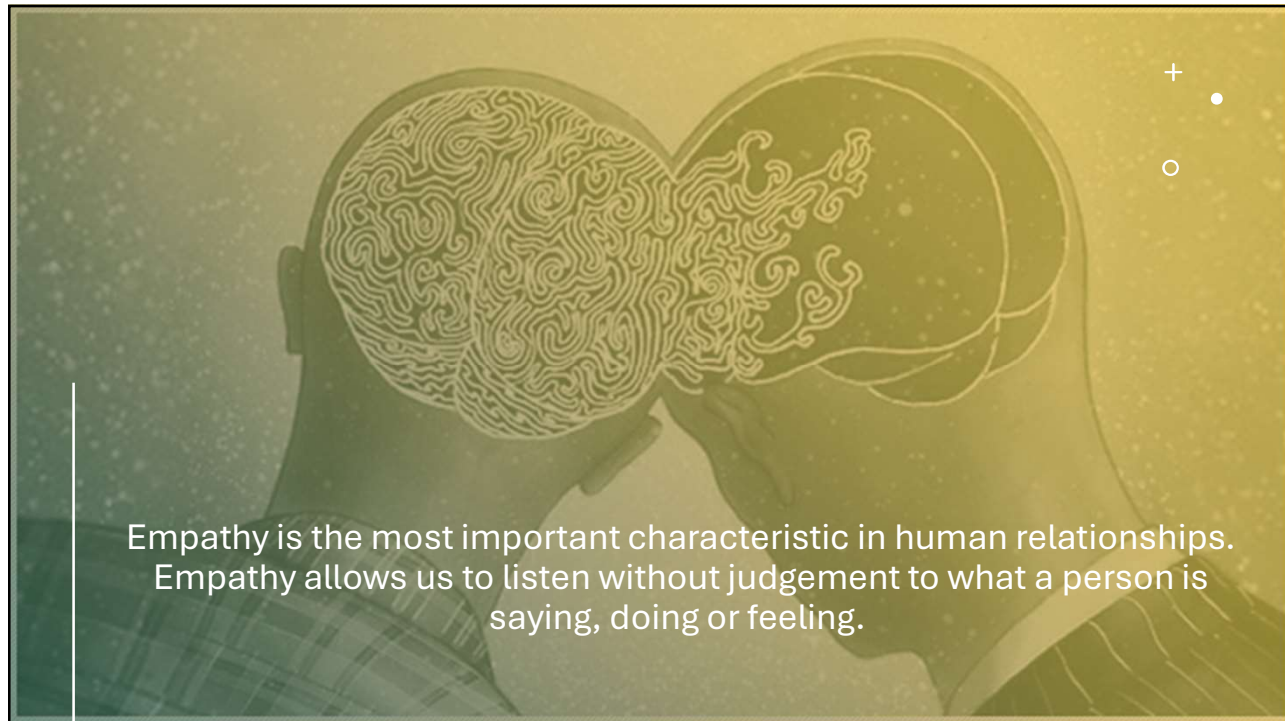
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Objectives

- Define and understand empathy
- Empathy and victims of violence
- Defense mechanisms of the domestic violence victim
- Having conversations with empathy
- Improve your empathy
- The law of responsibility


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Empathy is the most important characteristic in human relationships. Empathy allows us to listen without judgement to what a person is saying, doing or feeling.

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Why This Matters



- How you respond to a victim during and after a crisis or critical incident can have a direct effect on the victim, and those who may be present, such as family members or friends.
- One of your most important skills is being able to demonstrate empathy.

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Sympathy, Compassion, and Empathy are occasionally confused



Sympathy is described as feeling bad for another person or their experience without the ability to relate.

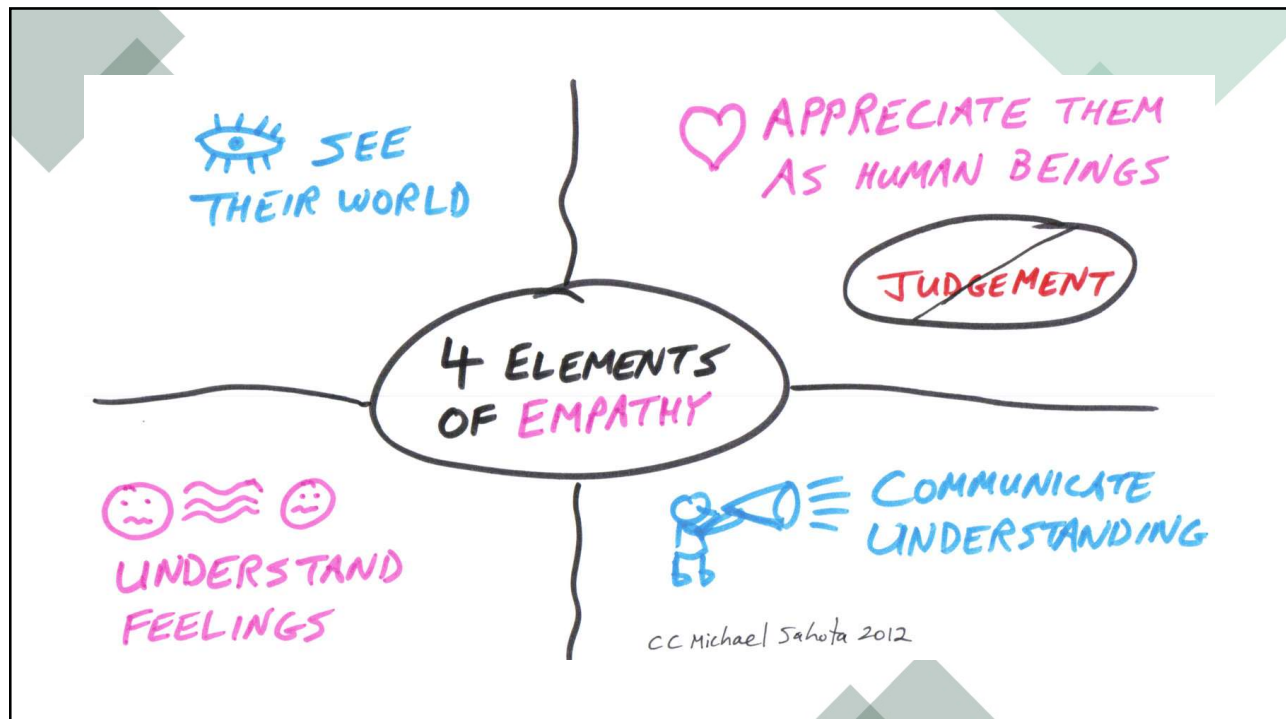


Compassion is being sympathetic to another's distress and frequently revolves around finding ways to alleviate or "fix" the perceived problem.



Empathy is seeking understanding and relating to another's experience. It **does not** require us to *share* the feelings of another or make a judgement—it requires us to seek understanding.

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Elements of Empathy



It does not mean to love or even like somebody.



You don't have to approve of them.



You aren't required to agree with what they say



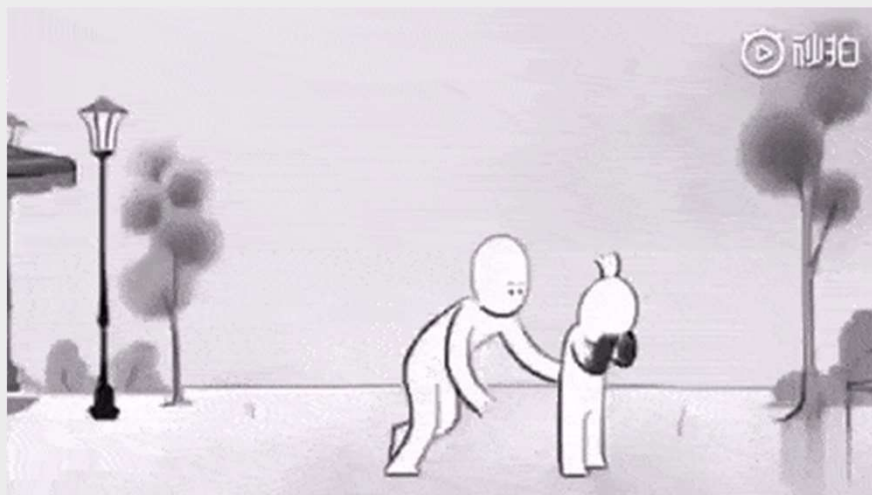
Empathy absorbs tension



Empathy helps others listen to you

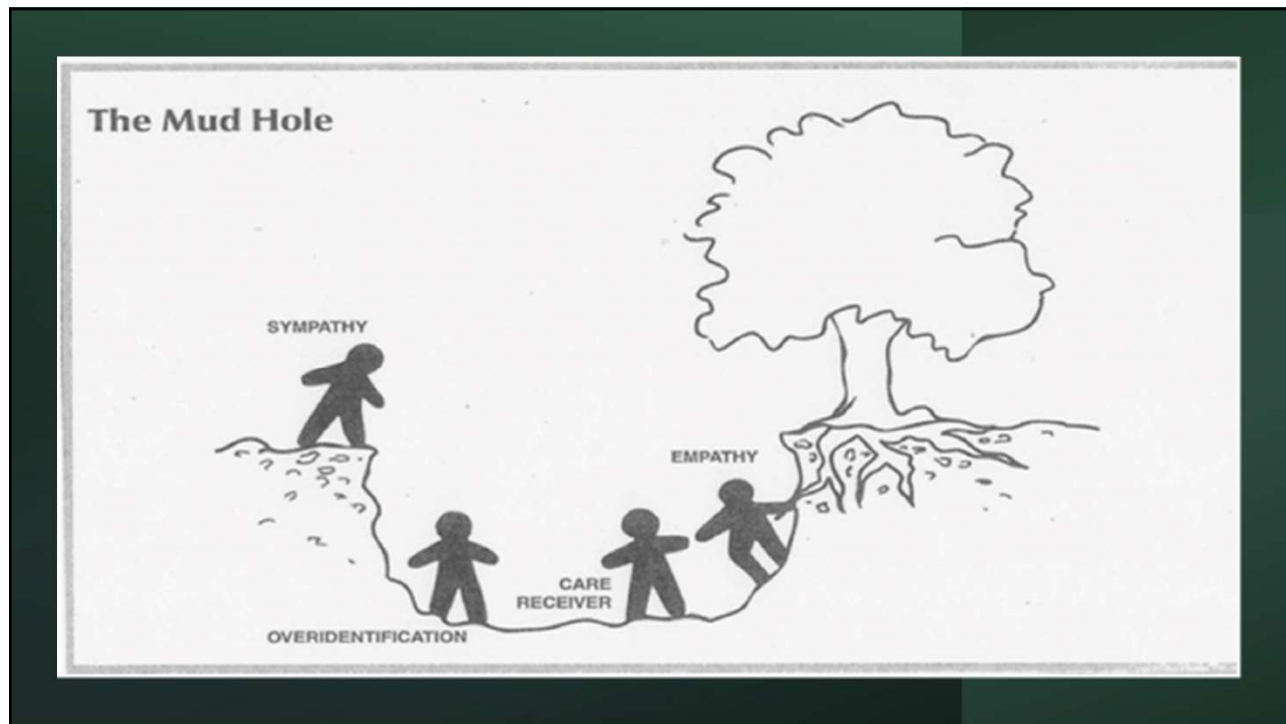
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(Possible) Side Effects



**No dogs were harmed in the making of this video

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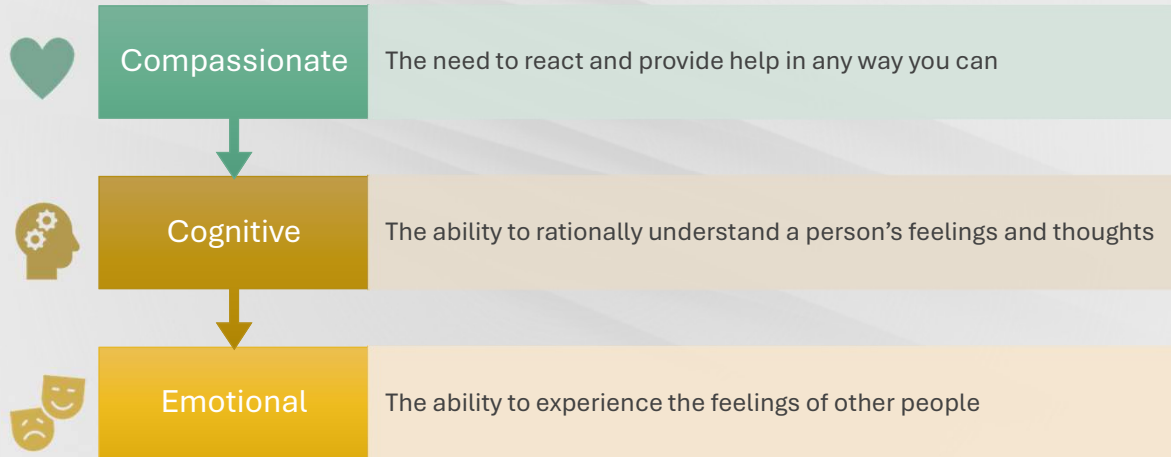
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Empathy permits us to imagine what someone else is experiencing without having had the experience.



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Three types of Empathy



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Where it starts - Developmental stages

- Infants:
 - Infants are totally self-directed and only know their own needs
- Toddlers:
 - 12-18 months they start to become aware of other people having emotions, may respond with same emotion or try to address the problem from their perspective
 - A child of two notices that other people can feel happy or sad when they do not, and can respond more appropriately



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Developmental stages, con't.

- Pre-teen
 - By 10, the child can imagine how he or she would feel in another person's situation.
 - Does not have intellectual capacity to know or imagine how the other person is feeling.
- Adolescents/Teens
 - In adolescence, young people start to think abstractly, which allows them to better grasp and apply the concept of empathy.
- Empathy, like any other skill, is a lifelong learning process
- Empathy can get stronger and deeper with age and experience



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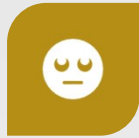
Empathy is being **aware** of and **sensitive** to the person's feelings in **order** to help them.

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Empathy and Victims of Violence



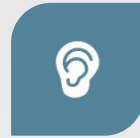
EMPATHY INCREASES THEIR WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE HONESTLY AND OPENLY, ENSURING WE OBTAIN BETTER AND MORE ACCURATE INFORMATION



EMPATHY INCREASES THEIR OPINION THAT THEIR EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN VALIDATED, WHICH HELPS HEALING



HEALING AFTER A VIOLENT INCIDENT IS JUST LIKE HEALING OTHER TRAUMA AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INJURY



IT STARTS WITH **LISTENING.**

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Listening



WHEN YOU ARE SEEN AND HEARD, THROUGH THAT ATTENTION, HEALING BEGINS.



ALL TOO OFTEN DOMESTIC ABUSE SURVIVORS ENDURE YEARS OF FRUSTRATION AND BOTTLED UP PAIN.



THEIR EXPERIENCE FALLS ON DEAF EARS WITH THE PERSON FROM WHOM THEY SEEK ATTENTION—THEIR ABUSIVE INTIMATE PARTNER.

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Listening

There can be repeated failed attempts to share their emotional wounds...leaving their loneliness and injury intact

When another person steps into that pain with them, it can draw their attention to what they may have repressed

When another person listens to your pain and steps into the point of pain with you, the process deepens

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Listening

- What domestic abuse survivors are more accustomed to, is hearing that their pain is not real, unwarranted, unjustified, and unnecessary.
- When another person stands with you in your trauma, whether an old or new injury, you normalize the feelings and validate their experience.
- It is through the attention that the **perspective shifts** and **healing occurs**.



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*Empathy: Let me hold the door for you.
I may have never walked in your shoes, but
I can see your soles are worn and your
strength is torn under the weight of a story
I have never lived before. Let me hold the
door for you. After all you've walked
through, it's the least I can do.*

MORGAN HARPER NICHOLS

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Overcoming Challenges

- When you employ the words that most naturally come to your lips, you run the risk of saying things you can never take back.
 - This happens most often when you allow others to set the tone in confrontations.
- We all deal with people “under the influence”.
 - If its not alcohol or drugs, its frustration, fear, impatience, lack of self-worth, defensiveness, and a host of other influences.
 - Trauma reactions can take over.

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Overcoming Challenges

- Develop a state of mind for dealing with individuals in crisis
 - Unbiased, open, and flexible are three great traits of a good communicator.
 - A closed mind misreads people and makes terrible errors.
 - The flexible mind has the surviving strength.
- Realize they may displace their anger at you, the helper
 - Redirect aggression to a less threatening target
 - Develop deflector phrases (verbal judo) statements that strip the insult of power.
 - I can hear that you are . . .
 - I understand that, but...



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Pause before
replying



Know your own
triggers



Question, but
with genuine
compassion



Speak their
language



Recognize it's
not about you –
even when they
say it is



The 4 F's
(Feelings First,
Facts Follow)

Overcoming Challenges

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If you're having trouble communicating with those from different walks of life, it may be because you're thinking about yourself instead of about them. If you allow your ego to get in the way, you will find yourself using your own language instead of the other person's.

GEORGE THOMPSON, VERBAL JUDO

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Defense Mechanisms of the Domestic Violence Victim

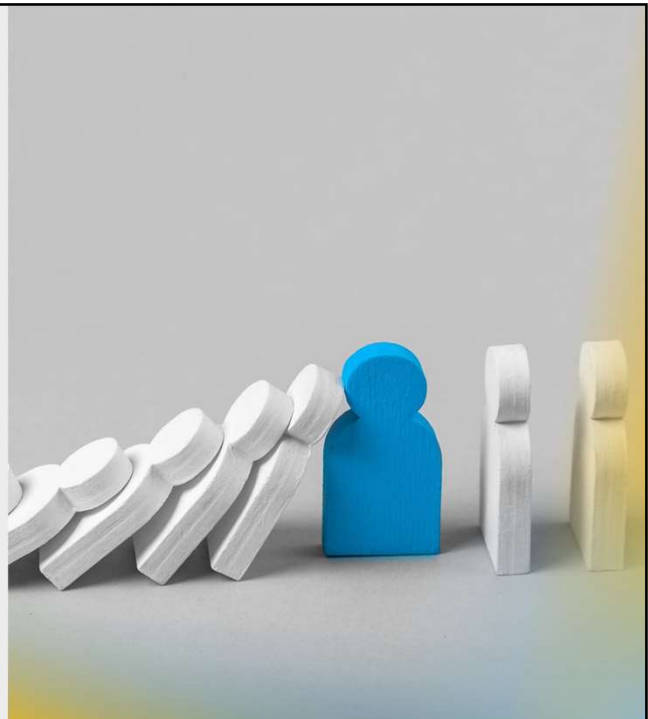
Denial

Defensiveness or Rationalization




Ambivalence

Avoidance

Fear



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Denial	Response
 <p>The victim may deny that the abuse is happening, often because acknowledging the abuse would be too overwhelming or frightening.</p>	<p>Gently bring up specific examples of concerning behaviors but be prepared for resistance.</p>
 <p>They might pretend that everything is fine to maintain a semblance of normalcy or to avoid conflict.</p>	<p>If the victim brushes off your concerns, reaffirm that you care about their well-being and that you are there for them—without judgement.</p>
 <p>Denial is a common psychological defense mechanism used to protect against the emotional impact of the abuse.</p>	<p>Emphasize that you are not judging them or their choices, as victims may fear rejection or blame, which can be a significant barrier to seeking help.</p>

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Defensiveness/Rationalization	Response
<p>The victim may defend or justify the abuser's behavior, often minimizing or rationalizing the abuse.</p>	<p>Avoid escalating the situation by engaging in arguments.</p>
<p>This may stem from a deep need to reconcile the relationship, or from fear of confronting the reality of the situation.</p>	<p>Refrain from speaking negatively about the abuser, as this may lead the victim to become defensive and polarize their feelings toward the abuser.</p>
<p>The victim might feel that the abuse is their fault, or that it is not as bad as it seems.</p>	<p>Focus on listening empathetically, acknowledging the strong emotions the victim is experiencing, and reinforcing that their feelings are valid.</p>

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Ambivalence

Victims of domestic violence often vacillate between wanting to leave the relationship and justifying staying.

One moment they may express a desire to leave, and the next, they may rationalize the abuser's actions or return to the relationship.

This inconsistency is a common coping mechanism influenced by fear, trauma bonding, or hope that things will improve.

Response

Do not give up on the victim, even if they seem indecisive.

If the victim feels they have no other options, their chances of leaving decrease significantly. Encourage them to explore options, understanding that leaving can be a long, complicated process.

It is common for a victim to leave and return to the relationship multiple times before they can leave for good. Offer consistent emotional support.

Acknowledge their fear of the unknown and the emotional difficulty of making such a decision.

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Avoidance

Victims may withdraw emotionally or physically, becoming hard for loved ones to reach.

This avoidance may be a coping mechanism to distance themselves from the emotional pain or a tactic used by the abuser to isolate them from support systems.

In some cases, the abuser may actively monitor or restrict the victim's communication with others, making it harder for the victim to reach out for help.

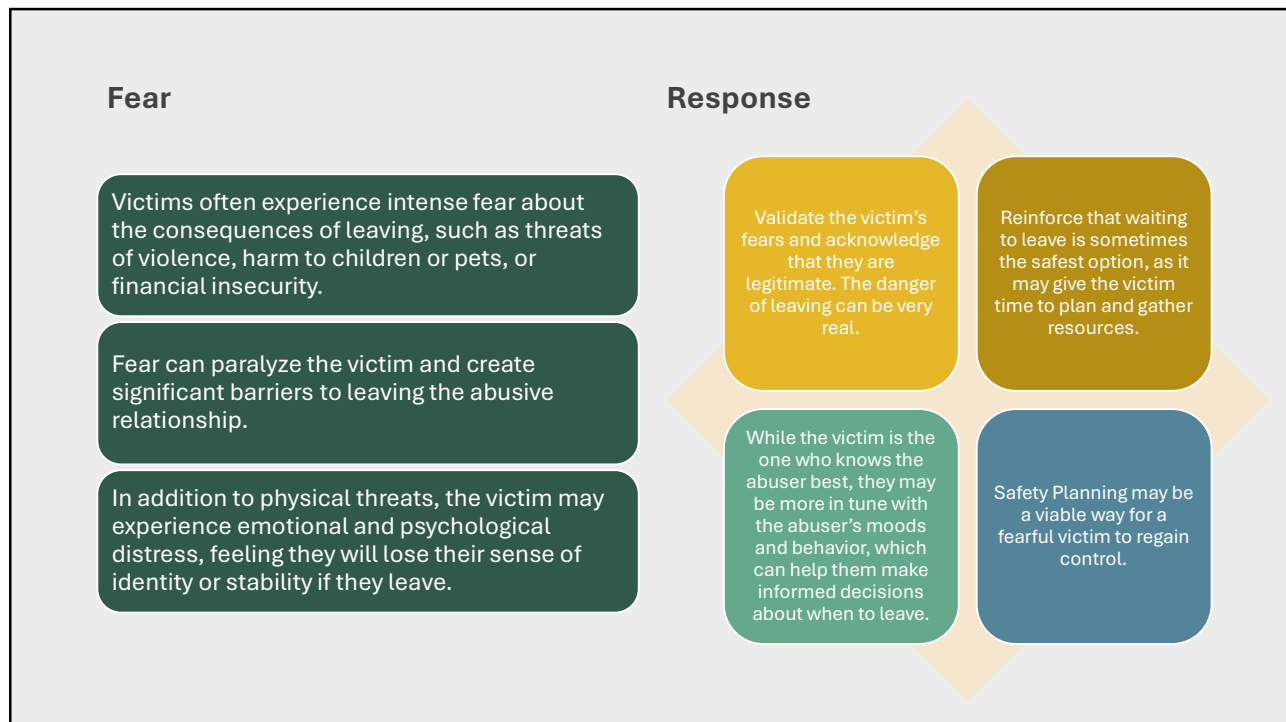
Response

Understand that the victim's withdrawal may be influenced by external factors, including the fear of worsening the situation.

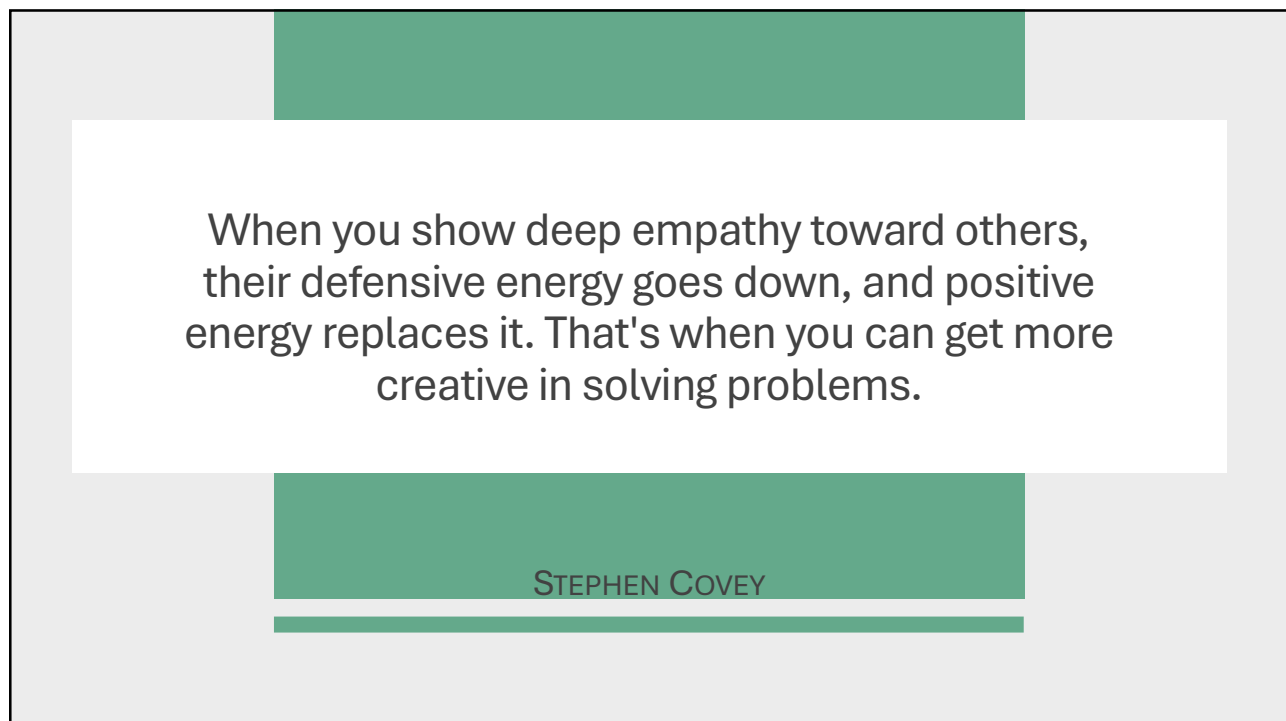
Avoid speaking negatively about the abuser, as the victim may be under surveillance and could fear repercussions.

Reaffirm that you are concerned for the victim's safety and well-being, and remind them that you are there for them, no matter what.

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Conversations With Empathy



Remain calm and project confidence

Assure them that talking to you is not compromising the investigation. Explain your role, emphasizing that their well-being is your priority.



Speak softly

Let them feel safe and heard. Adjust volume and pace according to their emotional state to increase their comfort



Allow for silence – with caution

Can be triggering or uncomfortable, so allow pauses – but remain present and attentive



Active, empathetic listening

Aim for 90/10 ratio – with 90 percent listening, 10 percent talking

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Conversations With Empathy



Tone and Body language

Be mindful of non-verbal cues – posture, eye contact, and facial expressions.



Avoid Judgement or Pressuring

Avoid pressuring them to come to an immediate decision. Respect their boundaries and let them disclose at their pace.



Calm, repetitive persistence if hysterical

“Sally, I need you to take a deep breath so I can help.”




Being general


People in crisis situations often fixate on details rather than the big picture. Stay focused on their emotional state and offering support.

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Statements to Facilitate Empathy




Take a minute to think as another might be thinking, then speak with their perspective in mind, can gain immediate rapport.



“Let me be sure I heard what you said”

It’s empathetic, full of conciliation, cooperation, and sincerity.



Use their name.

Personalizes the encounter, help them feel more connected, feel that you truly care about them and want to help.

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Phrases to Facilitate Empathy

1

Remember that even though you do this frequently, most people don’t. What you perceive as “minor” or merely “sad” is often a life changing experience for them.

2

Never tell someone to “calm down”. This command simply doesn’t work! It is a criticism of people’s behavior and implies that they have no right to be upset.

3

Never argue and don’t shout. Control your tone of voice. Be aware of body language that can aggravate people sensitive to behavior

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Queries to Facilitate Empathy

“Would you (or could you) tell me a little more about that?”

“What has this been like for you?”

“Is there anything else?”

“Are you okay with that?”

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Clarifications to Facilitate Empathy

“Let me see if I have this right.”

“I want to make sure I really understand what you’re telling me. I’m hearing that . . .”

“I don’t want us to go further until I’m sure I’ve gotten it right.”

“When I’m done, if I’ve gone astray, I’d appreciate it if you would correct me. Okay?”

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Responses to Facilitate Empathy

“That sounds very difficult.”

“Sounds like . . .”

“That’s great! I bet you’re feeling pretty good about that.”

“I can imagine that this might feel . . .”

“It’s reasonable that someone in your situation would feel that way . . .”

“I can see that you are . . .”

“It sounds like you’re having a normal reaction to an abnormal event.”

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Encouragement to Facilitate Empathy


Recognize their unique strength – knowing strength looks different in different situations

“It sounds like you did a great job making a tough decision.”

“I see how hard you’ve worked to protect your children.”

“You have persevered through a really difficult situation.”

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Healing With Empathy

- The experience of being known and accepted by another creates the capacity to heal
- Empathetic healing occurs when one person is fully present, genuinely listening, and putting aside notions of what should be done, in order to find out what the other person needs.
- Starting a person's contact with the criminal justice system with empathy can have a long term impact on their ability to heal from the event
 - Reverse is also true – a negative experience can affect their ability to process the event because we have the ability to ADD to the trauma

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The ability to practice empathy is one of the most important skills you can learn.



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Improve your Empathy

- **Acknowledge and Manage Your Own Emotions**
 - Understand that you will feel the emotions of others. Have strategies in place to process and release these feelings.
 - Take moments to relax your body, center yourself, and focus on key words like “curious” and “compassionate” to stay grounded.
- **Remember, Their Struggles Aren’t Your Own**
 - It’s important to recognize that while you can empathize, others’ problems are not your responsibility. This will help maintain healthy boundaries and prevent over-identifying.
- **You Can’t Be Everything to Everyone**
 - Focus on offering support without trying to fix everything. Set realistic expectations for both yourself and the people you help.

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Improve Your Empathy

- **Aim for Balanced, Reciprocal Relationships**
 - Build relationships based on mutual respect and understanding. Empathy is a two-way street, and healthy relationships require give-and-take.
- **Practice Curiosity and Openness**
 - Approach others with curiosity. Take an interest in their lives and perspectives, even if they seem vastly different from your own. This helps you grow in empathy and broadens your understanding of the world.
- **Engage with People Outside Your Circle**
 - Seek to learn from people you know little about, especially those outside your social or cultural group. This will expand your view of the diverse experiences of others.

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Improve Your Empathy

- **Resist the Urge to “Fix” Everything**
 - While it's natural to want to help, avoid trying to solve all problems. Sometimes, the best way to show empathy is to listen and be present, not to offer immediate solutions.
- **Challenge Your Own Biases**
 - Confront stereotypes and assumptions. Not everyone facing challenges (like unemployment, mental health issues, or homelessness) fits a particular narrative. Remain open to understanding each individual's unique situation.
- **Use Your Imagination to Empathize**
 - While you can't experience everything others go through, use your imagination to connect with their feelings. Try to envision how it might feel in their shoes, and use that to inform your understanding.

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Improve Your Empathy

- **Respect People's Need for Space**
 - Learn to recognize when someone doesn't want to talk. Pay attention to non-verbal cues, such as body language or tone, and respect their need for silence or distance.
- **See the Whole Person**
 - Move beyond labels or judgments. Take time to see people as individuals with complex lives and experiences, not defined solely by their circumstances.
- **Find Common Ground**
 - When interacting with someone who you might initially perceive as different or challenging, look for shared experiences or values. This common ground can help bridge divides and foster a deeper connection.
- **Empathy Check!**



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Be Curious; Not Judgmental

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3S16b-x5mRA&t=1s>



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The Law of Responsibility



The Law of Responsibility says that you are responsible **for** yourself and **to** others. It is realizing the boundaries of *what* you are to worry about and *how*.



There is nothing wrong with helping another person. It's one of the foundations of relationships and integral in advocacy.



Healthy boundaries is knowing when to step in and offer support, and when to step back and let them take responsibility.



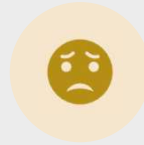
When you overstep, you can diminish their sense of agency, and as a result you can feel resentful and disempowered.

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When I feel responsible *FOR* others:



Actions: I try to *fix, protect, rescue, control,* and carry their feelings; I don't listen.



Feelings: I feel *tired, anxious, fearful, guilty, resentful,* and *taken advantage of.*



Focus: I focus on *solutions, being right, appearances, and winning.*



Behaviors: I *manipulate, enable,* and remove others' choices. I expect them to meet *my* expectations.

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When I feel responsible *TO* others:



Actions: I show empathy, encourage, share, confront lovingly, and listen.



Feelings: I feel relaxed, free, aware, and have high self-worth.



Focus: I focus on relating, understanding the whole person, and creating win-win situations.



Beliefs: I believe the person has the inner resources to help themselves, and I facilitate their growth.



Behaviors: I live in my integrity, expect others to be responsible for their own actions, and foster empowerment by encouraging personal decision-making.

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Closing Thoughts

Cultivate a Supportive State of Mind

- Develop a mindset focused on empathy, patience, and understanding.
- Practice grounding techniques to remain calm and focused, especially in high-stress situations.

Practice and Demonstrate Healthy Empathy

- Empathy is about *connecting* with the survivor's feelings without over-identifying or becoming emotionally overwhelmed.
- Show compassion, but respect their autonomy, offering support in a way that empowers them to make their own choices.

Utilize Problem-Solving Skills with Sensitivity

- Help survivors think through options, remember that they are ultimately responsible for their decisions.
- Offer guidance without taking over or "fixing" the problem for them.



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Closing Thoughts

Listen to Understand, Not to Reply

- Avoid rushing to offer solutions and advice.
- Focus on understanding their perspective. This builds trust and ensures you are responding to their needs, not just offering a scripted response.

Let Go of Cynicism

- Approach each survivor with a fresh perspective, free from doubt or judgement.
- Stay hopeful and open to the possibility of positive change.

Take care of YOU

- Self-care is essential for those who support survivors.
- Ensure you're setting health boundaries, managing your emotional well-being, and seeking support when needed.
- You can't effectively help others if you're not taking care of yourself.



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Thank you for your time!



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