

ICEBREAKER

Use this short icebreaker to help you connect and begin to think about the topic of empathy:

1. Divide into groups of two or three people.
2. Take five minutes for each group to make a list of everything they can think of that they have in common (e.g., gender or eye color).
3. Share your answers the entire group. What are the most unique things you found that you have in common?

INTRODUCTION

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. We aren't born empathetic, but we can cultivate it over time. Depending on personality, temperament, and family background, empathy comes fairly naturally to some but takes more practice for others. There are a couple of ways we can cultivate empathy.

- *Interacting with people.*
Through the ups and downs of life, as we laugh and cry with our friends and family, we begin to empathize with them.
- *Listening to stories.*
As you engage with the thoughts, feelings and perspectives of those you listen to or read about.

WATCH THE VIDEO

Watch this four-minute video by Brene Brown together. It illustrates different responses we might have to others' pain . . . even when we think we're really good empathizers.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw>

DISCUSS

1. In her talk, Brene Brown says sympathy (feeling sorry *for* people) drives disconnection while empathy (feeling *with* people) fuels connection. Would you describe the family you grew up in as empathetic? If so, what did that look like?
2. What's one way you can demonstrate empathy? How can you show you are listening?
3. **Read Romans 12:9–15.**
In this passage, the apostle Paul describes what it looks like to be empathetic toward others. What characteristics does Paul name in the passage?
4. In your marriage, what is your natural response when emotion surfaces? Do you ignore it, excuse it, attempt to fix it, deal with it, or something else?
 - Ignore it.
 - Excuse it.
 - Try to fix it.
 - Deal with it.
 - Something else.



5. How can we use our prayer request time in group as an opportunity to practice empathy?
6. The video mentioned four qualities of empathy—perspective-taking, staying out of judgment, recognizing emotion in others, and communicating the emotion you see. Why do you think it's challenging to stay out of judgment?

