

Empathy Buddy Guidelines

An essential part of our practice in the Shamelessly Alive Women's Course is your off-line empathy buddy sessions. Through receiving empathy, we have the chance to self-connect, to increase our awareness of what's going at the core beneath the surface level of story and judgments, and to transform suffering into peace. Through offering empathy, we have the chance to practice connecting to the heart of another, beneath the layers of story and judgment (theirs and our own), not just for their sake, but for our own sense of connectedness with another being.

The practice of offering and receiving empathy from another will help to build your inner empathy muscle, useful for finding compassion, solace, and peace within in times of turmoil, and for strengthening your capacity to connect with others even when strife and conflict rear their head.

Scheduling:

Your empathy buddy practice begins the moment you set up a time to meet and work together. Through this practice, we are creating sacred relationships in which our interdependence and vulnerability alike are heightened, and I ask you to hold your time together with utmost care.

Please stick to your scheduled times, and avoid rescheduling. If you must reschedule, please give your buddy as much notice as possible.

This is sacred work we are up to, in which we receive the gift of mutual support in opening to vulnerability, deepened self-awareness, and healing, and I ask you to hold both your own heart and your buddy's heart with care accordingly.

Overall Timing & Structure:

I suggest you meet for approximately one hour every week or every two weeks. Sessions can be in-person (for the locals among you) or over the phone or Skype.

Structure:

1 min to sit quietly
25 min speaker A
1 min to sit quietly
3 min feedback A to B

Switch!



1 min to sit quietly
25 min speaker B
1 min to sit quietly
3 min feedback B to A

SELF-CONNECTION (1 minute)

Start with a minute to quiet and ground, letting your attention come into the present moment. You might notice what needs you are hoping to meet in your time together, such as connection, self-awareness, healing, learning, etc.

EMPATHY! (25 minutes)

What is Empathy?

Adapted from BayNVC:

- listening open-heartedly
- helping your partner connect to her own feelings and needs
- helping your partner slow down and feel what she is feeling
- avoiding concurring or "agreeing"; with your partner's "story" or interpretations of events
- avoiding dissenting or "disagreeing" with your partner's "story" or interpretations of events
- avoiding switching to strategy or advice
- using self-empathy to help yourself come back to presence

As a recipient of empathy, one might:

- ask for reflections
- help your partner know what pace of questions is good for you
- be honest about when a guess "hits the mark" or not

Speaker: You can talk about anything that's alive for you, whether positive or negative, troubling or celebratory.

As often as you'd like, ask for reflection of what the listener has heard. If the listener doesn't "get it," it's all good, simply thank them and then offer a gentle reorienting to what part was important to you that you wanted them to hear.

You might close your time by checking to see if any request arises of yourself. With the awareness that you now have of what's important to you, do you have any request of yourself to take any particular action? You may not. The point is to notice how a new world of possibilities often opens up when we settle into a more self-connected place.

Listener: When you sense it would be supportive to Speaker, as well as for your own clarity in following along, gently interrupt to ask if you can reflect back what you're hearing.

Reflect back:

Observations (“So I hear that such-and-such happened...”)

Feelings (“Are you feeling scared?” or “I’m wondering if you’re feeling scared?”)

Needs (“Because you have a need for autonomy, certainty, etc.?”)

Requests (Only *if* Speaker has named one, at the end of her session)

Listener:

This is your invitation to drop any inclination to offer advice, suggestions, stories, etc., and to **simply focus on feelings and needs** as well as the “gist” of what the Speaker is saying.

Let go of the urgency to fix or help. See if you can let your empathy guesses come from a relaxed, laid back place. Your presence is, truly, the most important gift you can offer.

STOPPING:

When it's time to stop, actually stop. Closing is as important a part of the practice as is opening. It's here that we're reminded that, no matter what is happening in our lives, no matter how much chaos and madness and strife we perceive, in this present moment, our bodies are, for the most part, okay. We are reminded that, even though we are sensitive, vulnerable, fallible human beings, that we also have the resources and the strength to carry on, to close up the box, to go into pain and to come out of it as well, noticing the harmlessness of the present moment.

Listeners – please don't invite your buddy to go over their allotted time. When you see them as incapable of closing, this reinforces any belief the speaker may already have that they are weak and powerless. Trust the strength and resourcefulness of your buddy. Trust that they have the capacity to close, to transition, and to hold space for you as well, just as you have held space for them.

In addition to reinforcing our sense of resilience, this practice reinforces the solidity of the container of our time together. When we tweak the timing aspect of the container, we weaken its trustworthiness. Everything we do to acknowledge the container and its limits helps to strengthen the potency of the practice, and deepen our time together *within* the container.

If as speaker, you've gone in particularly deep, you might take a minute just to look around the room, to “orient,” to name 5 colors you see, spell your name



backwards, notice the feeling of your toes in your shoes, wiggling them around, etc.

SELF-CONNECTION: (1 min)

End each empathy buddy dyad with a short sit, perhaps connecting to gratitude for your time together.

FEEDBACK: (3 min)

What went well? What could have gone better?

See if you can offer feedback in the format of what you observed, how you felt, and what needs were met or not met. Get as specific as you can. This can be feedback both about the structural setting of your time together (location, time, etc.) and about the specific content of your empathy buddy session.

Listener: This is your chance to hear how it was for the other person to experience your empathic listening. I recommend that the speaker tells you first what they enjoyed, but if you also want to hear about what they did not enjoy, you can go ahead and request that from them.

SWITCH!

When the first speaker has used their time, switch roles.

That's it! You're session is complete.... 😊