The Development of Empathy

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January 30, 2014
Can empathy be taught?
Definitions

**Sympathy** = Sym (same) suffering

Sharing emotions, emotional resonance, **Feeling “for”**

**Empathy** = (Greek) Em (in) Pathos (suffering)

Understanding emotions and thoughts of others and responding with care. **Feeling “with”** leading to a response

**Antipathy** = Anti (against/avoid)

Disregard for another’s suffering

**Compassion** = (Latin) Co (with) Passion (Suffering)

Suffering with another person and responding
Empathy in Medicine—A Neurobiological Perspective

Helen Riess, MD

PHYSICIAN’S ATTITUDE AND APPROACH AFFECT EVERY ASPECT OF MEDICAL CARE FOR PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES. AN EMPATHIC BEDSIDE MANNER IS NO QUANT RELIC OF THE PAST. TO RESTORE AND ENSURE PUBLIC TRUST...

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Components of Empathy

Cognitive

Behavioral

Affective

Moral

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Empathic Capacity

Perception

Cognitive Empathy

Perspective Taking/
Perspective Getting

Empathic Projection

Response

Motor Mimicry

Affective Empathy=
SYMPATHY

Empathic Distress

Empathic Concern=
COMPASSION
Can Doctors Learn Empathy?

By PAULINE W. CHEN, M.D.

A new study reveals that they can.

Dr. Helen Riess, director of the Empathy and Relational Science Program in the department of psychiatry at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, created a series of empathy “training modules” for doctors. The tools are designed to teach methods for recognizing key nonverbal cues and facial expressions in patients as well as strategies for dealing with one’s own physiologic responses to highly emotional encounters.

June 21, 2012
EMPATHY BEGINS WITH: SELF-EMPATHY:

- **When you are One Hundred Years old...** What would you like to see when you look back on your life when you are 100 years old?

- What do you wish you had done?

- What risks do you wish you had taken?

- With whom would you have liked to spend more time?
Psychoanalytic Theorists

Sigmund Freud
1856 – 1939

Melanie Klein
1882 – 1960

Heinz Kohut
1913 – 1981
Theories of Childhood Empathy

- **Freud**—"Pleasure Principle" thumb sucking

- **Melanie Klein**—Object Relations Theory

- **Heinz Kohut**—"The importance of the matrix of empathy in which we grow up cannot be overestimated." Thumb sucking as soothing
Attachment Theorists

Mary Ainsworth
1913-1999

John Bowlby
1907-1990

Mary Main
1943 -
Infant- Mother Attachment Theory

- John Bowlby- Human motivation for affective engagement

- Mary Ainsworth/Mary Main- Reciprocal responsiveness to signals- The stranger situation

- Donald Winnicott- ”A relationship precedes and individual. Individuals are formed in relationship.”
Development of Empathy

- Infancy-hospital nursery
- 6 months: Social Referencing- sensitivity to parents’ reactions
- 18-24 months: Theory of Mind- Toddler first realizes that he has his own thoughts, feelings and goals, and others’ thoughts and ideas may be different from his.
- 18-24 months: Recognizes self in mirror- understands herself as being a separate person.
Development of Empathy

- **Toddler-**
  - 2 yo — responds to mother crying
    - Recognizes other distress
    - Self-other discrimination
  - 3 yo - Aware and responds to distress they understand
    - Unaware of social norms: “Look Mommy!”
    - Unable to understand how what they say affects others
    - How Parents respond is predictive of empathic development
Development of Empathy

- Age 4- Toddler begins to associate his emotions with the feelings of others.
  - Stomach ache. Empathic projection or aggressive response – pain of others may make them uncomfortable and does not know what to do...

- Age 5- Child can learn about empathy through hypothetical examples, “How would your friend feel if someone took away his toy?” Imagine Self

- Age 8- Child can grapple with more complex moral decisions by realizing someone else may have different feelings from her own.
Teaching your child empathy

Empathize with your child. Understand his need for security.
“Are you scared of the dog?”

Physical touch validates caring and provides security.

Talk about others’ feelings: “Sarah is sad because you broke her toy”

Be a role model- Your respectful, caring interactions with others show empathy by example “Let’s get Billy some ice for his boo-boo

The way you show empathy may be more important than anything you say

Validate your child’s difficult emotions- label and validate, don’t rush to fix.

Use of play- Stuffed animals can be selfish