Empathy Circles

EMPATHY is our "innate" ability to be with the feelings and needs in ourselves and others. "Giving" empathy, we are simply returning us all to Life as it is. Empathy can only occur when our preconceived ideas and judgments are put aside and there is an openness to serving as witness to someone else's experience. Words are used when either the giver or receiver wants verbal confirmation that the giver is clearly seeing the receiver.

Other kinds of responses:

- Give advice/ Judge/ Fix the problem ('if I were you, I would...')
- Explain it Away / Correct the other person's understanding
- Console / Sympathize / Reassure
- Evaluate / Educate
- Shut down feelings / Take their mind 'off the problem' ('let's go see a movie')
- Investigate / Interrogate (i.e. 'when did this start to happen?')
- Tell your Story ('that reminds me of when...') / One-up the other person



Before playing, you will need to download a deck of Needs Cards from www.zenvc.org (Go to Resources/Learning Materials from the top menu), or worldempathy.org.

Print them out and cut them so that there's just one needs word on each card.

- 1. Everyone playing sits in a circle. Spread out the needs cards face-up on the floor or table in the middle.
- 2. One person is invited to talk for a few minutes about something that is happening in their life. This could be something either painful or joyful. It could be a small event or a big event.
- 3. While the person is talking, everyone else listens silently.
- 4. After the person has finished telling their story, everyone else silently looks at the needs cards to guess what needs are important to the person who told the story. Each person makes their best guess by quietly picking up one or two needs cards and placing them in front of the person who shared the story.
- 5. The person who told the story looks at the needs cards that were placed in front of him/ her and takes a minute to quietly receive these words. When they're done, they put the cards back into center of the circle.
- 6. Now, another person in the circle talks about something that is happening in their life and the game repeats, until everyone in the circle has had a chance to share.