

## EMPATHIC RESPONSES

'Empathy' is an attempt to 'feel with' a person, as opposed to 'feeling sorry for them'. Although we can never know exactly what another person may be feeling, we can, by listening carefully and using our imagination sensitively, try to sense what their feelings are about the situation they are describing to us. An empathic response is a tentative attempt to put into words what the other may be feeling. It is important not to make assumptions, and therefore you must:-

- i) 'clarify your hunch' as to what the other person may be feeling, through a statement, a question, or by waiting for the speaker to say or show more of their actual feelings;
- ii) phrase your response in such a way that the other person is free to agree or disagree.

A good empathic response helps the speaker to feel that you have heard them accurately, and gives them confidence in expressing their feelings further.

"Empathy is the ability to put yourself in another's shoes; so that you can understand what they feel because you can see the situation from their point of view. It is different from sympathy which has 'sentimental' overtones and suggests that the 'helper' feels compassion for the one who is hurt. A helper exhibiting empathy is able to reflect back the other's feelings. The sympathetic helper communicates their own (the helper's feelings) to the person seeking help.

Empathy is one way of building trust in a helpful relationship. It enables the creation of a feeling of support and security that encourages openness so that a situation can be explored in depth"

('Christian Caring', Scripture Union, Page 26)

\*\*\*\*\*

## EMPATHY EXERCISE A

Look at the following opening comments from someone seeking help, and decide which of the five possible replies best communicates an empathetic response.

- (i) I'm not going to get through this job interview. I know I'll make a mess of it like I always do.
  - a. No you won't, not if you make up your mind not to.
  - b. Come on! Have some faith in yourself. You'll be all right.
  - c. You're worried you'll go to pieces when you get in there.
  - d. Why don't you talk to someone who has already had the interview and pick up some tips.
  - e. You feel you've had some bad interview experiences and that this one will be bad too; I'm sure it won't be this time.

(ii) God seems so far away. When I pray it all feels unreal as if God has abandoned me.

- a. You must believe that He's with you - that's what faith is.
- b. You sound as if you feel very much alone.
- c. I guess we all go through these feelings.
- d. Would you like me to pray with you?
- e. You sound as though you don't believe in God anymore.

(iii) I'm glad you have come to see me because I'm seriously in debt. What do you think I should do?

- a. You seem to want me to tell you what to do.
- b. The first thing is to check out some information. Have you considered a loan?
- c. I can't solve your problems for you, you know.
- d. What do you want to do?
- e. You're worried and you don't know which way to turn.

(iv) Business is bad. They're talking about making people redundant.

- a. I know I'm worried too. Don't know what will happen.
- b. You're worried you could be the next one to lose a job.
- c. Yes it's a sign of the times, it's an increasing problem.
- d. Don't worry. I'm sure things are exaggerated.
- e. Aren't we all in the same boat?

(v) I'd like to go out more but I don't find it easy to meet people.

- a. That's no problem if you really want to go out.
- b. I'm here to help you meet more people.
- c. That sounds a difficult step to have to take.
- d. People are quite friendly really.
- e. Do you really want to meet people?