



Seeing things from your partner's perspective

Welcome to the RelationKit mindfulness series.

Empathy is our ability to see things from another person's perspective, as if we step into their shoes and see what they are seeing or even feel what they are feeling. It's having understanding, without having to agree with what they're saying or doing, but you are understanding why they might be acting or reacting in the way that they are.

Developing empathy towards your partner can really help you stay connected to them. It can be hard sometimes, especially if they have acted in hurtful ways, and negative thoughts or feelings like bitterness come up, so it's important to notice how we feel and to give ourselves self-empathy first. And then we can try to understand better where our partner is coming from.

So, let's begin. Find your posture and get comfy in your body and take some slow easy breaths now, your breath bringing you into the here and now, your breath softening any areas of your body that might be tense. Can you feel your breath creating space in your mind for thoughts to flow more freely through?

And once you feel more calm, open your awareness to life with your partner right now. Reflect on how your relationship is presently. Maybe for now all is well, things are calm, ticking over, or maybe there's some struggle or disagreement that you are experiencing with each other. It could be small or pretty major. Whatever the size of it, invite that gently into your mind's eye now, and then let that sink into your body, so that you become aware any connected feelings arising. Breathe with anything there.

Notice the mind's tendency to tell stories and feed the drama around whatever has come into your awareness. Notice any thoughts coming from your thinking mind. It's so tempting to go to thought when you are having an emotional reaction, but see if you can stay with those feelings in your body. Give yourself silent empathy now with whatever is present - "It's ok to feel this right now" – letting it be there.

Now reflect on whether there is any frustration, anger, blame towards your partner or resentment when you think about the problem you're going through together. Again, this is normal, let those emotions be felt. Breathe with them. And now see for moment if you can change your perspective, as if right now you step into your partner's shoes and begin to imagine yourself in their position. What do you see? What do you feel?

In this conflict, they are suffering too. Now, that can be hard to take in at first, but remember that in any conflict, all sides are suffering at some level, with maybe discomfort, shame or pain or being misunderstood. Take a moment to reflect on this and to breathe with whatever comes up with a loving kindness, a loving awareness.

What might they be feeling at present? What are they going through in their own life? Are they under any stress, anxiety, with work, or the juggle of childcare, ill parents or financial struggles? Have they been through any loss of any kind? Maybe they find it really difficult

to express emotions healthily. Maybe they were never taught how. All of these things can affect the way we behave.

We all have pain, loss and wounds from small to great. When we acknowledge that we are not different - that we all suffer in this way - it can help us understand where another person is coming from. We might not agree, but we can understand.

Consider now, might their needs be different to yours? Might they want a different outcome to something? What is important to your partner - really and truly important?

Know that they, deep down like yourself, don't choose to be in conflict. Conflict comes from deeper emotions such as fear or rejection. Be with that thought for a moment.

What might they be going through at present? You're having empathy for your partner now.

Reflect on how your partner is, what they look like, what they do when they are at their most stressed, and then recognise how your partner is, what they look like, the things they say and do when you see them at their happiest. This can help you understand what's really going on – that something underneath the behaviour is there.

Now gently come back to the problem in your relationship that is causing conflict, and maybe now having given empathy to your partner, there is less blame, less judgment and a bit more understanding.

Maybe your feelings around this problem have softened a little. This doesn't mean that you are a doormat and you're not going to do anything about the situation, it just means you are going approach it from a less emotionally charged and more understanding and loving place.

Can you imagine going to your partner to talk about the problem now? Does it feel more welcoming? If you still feel that you are holding onto negative emotions and can't quite find the empathy yet, then know that this is okay, perhaps you just need to offer yourself more self-empathy first.

You will know when you are ready or in a good emotional place to approach your partner about the problem because there will be a natural wish and interest to want to know what is happening for them, and what they might be going through.

When you are ready, let your attention come back to your soothing breath, flowing in and out of your body, and gently re-open your eyes.

Take care 'til next time.