



SHANE LYNCH PSYCHOLOGY

Spring has sprung?

Sure seems that way! Although it won't be April in Calgary without some kind of meteorological mishap.

Remember...

Empathy means we can sit with someone else's pain without fixing it.

About Shane

One of my favourite things to do when the weather turns is go for bike rides.

I used to do this as a kid and would spend hours and hours exploring Fish Creek Park on my bike with my friends.

Now, two of my three boys are riding bikes without training wheels and I can almost taste the "off the main path" rides we'll be able to take as a family.

Here's to finding fun outdoor activities that facilitate connection and contentment with those important people in our lives!



The War on Empathy

Empathy—the ability to deeply understand what someone else is going through—is often seen as one of the most human qualities we can have. It helps us connect, support each other, and build meaningful relationships. But lately, there's been some talk suggesting that empathy might actually be a problem.

Critics say it can make us overly emotional or even burn us out, especially in caregiving roles, but across any number of sectors. As a psychologist trained in Internal Family Systems (IFS) therapy, I see empathy not as a weakness, but as a powerful tool for healing and growth. While it's true that empathy can feel heavy at times, when it's balanced and healthy, it becomes one of the most important strengths a person can develop.

Empathy isn't just about feelings. Empathy is about showing a deeper understanding of someone else's whole experience *as if* we also experienced it. It may include someone's thoughts or feelings.

Both are essential in relationships, therapy, and everyday life. In IFS therapy, I help people explore their "inner parts"—like the anxious part, the angry part, or the protective part. Empathy is what lets



Tips for Dads & Moms

Imagine you learn your child is being bullied at school. There may be a host of reactions you might experience: anger, sadness, frustration, indignation etc. In the end, we feel bad for our child. We might think in our experience of relative futility that to have pity is what we're left with. If your child could express their feelings when you had pity on them, they would likely feel similarly powerless, and even embrace the futility they feel. Empathy, on the other hand, creates connection, understanding, and would help you to learn what your child actually wants both in that moment with you and when they are back at school. They shift from futility to empowered that a way out is possible.



Shane F. Lynch, MA, CCC, R. Psych

people listen to these parts with compassion instead of judgment. That's where healing begins.

Research shows that empathy leads to better relationships, stronger communities, and greater personal satisfaction. In therapy, it's one of the strongest predictors of healing. A large study by Elliott and colleagues (2011) found that empathy from therapists is directly linked to better outcomes for clients.

In everyday life, empathy helps us navigate conflict, support friends, and even raise emotionally healthy children. When we feel truly seen and understood, we thrive.

Even in high-stress professions, empathy doesn't have to be draining. A 2021 study found that *positive empathy*—feeling joy or excitement with someone—is actually linked to lower burnout. So it's not empathy itself that's the problem; it's how we manage and balance it.

Can you have too much empathy? Yes—but that doesn't mean it's bad. Like any strength, empathy can become overwhelming if it's not balanced. Some people, especially those who are very sensitive or work in jobs that trigger their emotional parts, might take on too much of others' pain (that is, they let parts lead). This can trigger parts that are stressed or burnout.

Tone and Tully (2014) described empathy as a “risky strength”—meaning it's powerful, but needs to be used wisely. Setting emotional boundaries, practicing self-care, and learning to recognize your parts can help keep empathy from becoming draining.

True empathy takes courage. Courage is one of the 8 C's of Self—courage, curiosity, compassion, clarity, creativity, calm, connection, confidence. Empathy means being willing to sit with someone else's pain—not to fix it, but to simply be with them in it. That takes emotional strength, not weakness. As empathy researcher Elizabeth Segal (2020) wrote, empathy “requires deep insights and balanced emotions,” and those don't come easy. They're built through intention, self-awareness, and care.

In a world that feels divided, empathy is the bridge. Rather than pulling back from empathy, we need more of it—just with better tools. When we understand that empathy is both a gift and a skill, we can learn how to use it in a way that helps others without hurting ourselves.

In the IFS approach, we say healing begins with curiosity and compassion. Empathy makes both possible. So let's stop calling it a liability. Let's call it what it is: a superpower.