



Stress Management Skills From Flowstate – Accurate Empathy

Consider the scenario that you and someone important to you see a situation differently. Maybe you have argued with no resolution, maybe hot words, maybe sulking, maybe just giving up and a feeling of distance between you. You know something needs to change or this will have a longer-term negative impact. The distance is stressful! Improving **Accurate Empathy** can strengthen the connection between you and make further problem solving smoother.

Accurate Empathy has two elements, **Thought Empathy** and **Feeling Empathy**. In **Thought Empathy**, you demonstrate that you are willing to see things the way the other person sees them, even if you disagree about the way things are. You can describe their perspective to them. It is like walking around to their side of the situation and verbalizing what they see, not what you saw from your side. Your perspective might be helpful later, but only after you have validated their perspective. You might not be 100% accurate, but you are demonstrating that you are willing make that effort, and that understanding them is more important to you than being “right.” Sensing you are beside them and not opposite them can be very facilitating.

In **Feeling Empathy**, you do your best to name the emotions that the situation evokes in them. Sometimes their emotion looks like one thing – anger, perhaps, but underneath is something else, like hurt, disappointment, or worry. Again, you can verbalize it to them as your best guess.

“I’ve been so excited telling everyone about your new job, but I can see that you are thinking about the colleagues and patients you’re leaving behind, and that makes you feel a sense of loss, or even guilty about leaving them.”

“When you told me about that problem and I jumped right away to advice and solutions, it maybe sounded like I wanted to dismiss you and get on with things, and not like I cared about what mattered to you.”

Homework: This month, challenge yourself to using this skill in a relationship that matters to you. Your accurate empathy can mean a lot to someone you care about.

Adapted from David D. Burns, M.D., author of “Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy.”