

# The Connection Practice: Uniting Empathy and Insight

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1. Introduction to the Connection Process
2. Brief sharing of research supporting the practice: emotional awareness, empathy, regulation of emotions, creative insight, breath work, positive thinking, and clearing the mind.
3. Identify a simple situation involving another person for practice.
4. Practicing step one. Empathy for self.
5. Practicing step two. Empathy for others (guessing feelings and needs).
6. Finding a relaxed and appreciative state of being.
7. Looking for solutions from a relaxed state of being.
8. Sharing and discussion.
9. Concluding remarks.

## **Learning Objectives – In this experiential session you will:**

- develop greater emotional intelligence by exploring the inner self and bringing greater understanding to a current life challenge or celebration.
- increase connections with others by increasing your ability to describe and communicate the potential feelings and needs of others.
- connect with a stress free state that you can rapidly and reliably drop into when confronted with life's challenges.
- experience how this state coupled with empathy for self and others can help you gain new insights.

## **The Connection Practice**

The Connection Practice is a strategy that can be easily taught and used to increase resiliency in children and adults. It is a process that draws from the research literature on non-violent communication, effective listening, empathy development, self-awareness, self-compassion, mindfulness, breathwork, creative problem solving, happiness, and resiliency.

The Connection Process involves four steps. They are briefly described below. For each step I have included several examples of relevant research on the reference page.

- 1) **Practice self-empathy (self-compassion).** Begin with selecting a challenge or celebration. Name your feelings as they relate to that particular challenge or celebration. Corresponding needs are then selected from a list with the knowledge that needs are a shared common experience (an important element of self-compassion).
- 2) **Practice empathy for others.** If there is another person involved in the event, practice empathy for others by guessing what their feelings and needs are. Trying to understand a conflict or shared experience from another person's point of view is a very important step in helping to create meaningful relationships and more peaceful communities.
- 3) **Purposely become aware of a still, quiet, appreciative, non-judgmental place connecting your mind and heart.** After examining the feelings and needs of self and others there is much to be gained by stepping away from the situation and going to a positive heartfelt place. In this place ask if there is something you need to know. Being in a state of appreciation coupled with slow even breathing enhances the connection process and increases the likelihood that this part of the practice will result in insights that go beyond empathy for self and others. Rita Marie Johnson (2015), the founder of the Connection Practice, talks about this as a way to access a heart-brain connection.
- 4) **Being open to insights or solutions that surface.** Research on insight, intuition, and creativity suggests that stepping away from a problem or challenge allows for unconscious processes to engage and offer up new and interesting ways to look at events or challenges in our lives. This doesn't always occur but giving your brain a sort of high-quality timeout coupled with a better understanding of everyone's potential needs can result in some very powerful insights. Of course, if an insight for action emerges, then a plan of action is made.

The Connection Practice can be used with children or adults in classrooms, community groups, businesses, youth programs, and homes to create a more positive sense of wellbeing, healthy lifestyle, and cognitive functioning (Johnson, 2015). More information about Dr. Deborah Byrnes is available at: [www.heartfulminds.com](http://www.heartfulminds.com). In addition, see [rasurinternational.org](http://rasurinternational.org) for additional information on The Connection Practice and more in-depth training options.



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### Feelings related to challenges:

afraid	fed up	regretful
angry	frustrated	reluctant
annoyed	furios	resentful
anxious	grumpy	sad
ashamed	guilty	scared
bewildered	helpless	sensitive
bored	hesitant	shocked
bothered	hopeless	shy
concerned	horrified	stressed
confused	hostile	surprised
depressed	hurt	suspicious
desperate	impatient	tense
disappointed	insecure	terrified
discouraged	irritated	tired
disgusted	jealous	torn
dismayed	lazy	uncertain
distressed	lonely	uncomfortable
drained	lost	unhappy
dread	miserable	unsafe
embarrassed	moody	unsatisfied
envious	nervous	unsure
exasperated	numb	upset
exhausted	overwhelmed	vulnerable
fearful	pessimistic	worried





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**Feelings related to celebrations:**

adventurous  
affectionate  
alive  
amazed  
appreciative  
calm  
centered  
comfortable  
compassionate  
confident  
content  
curious  
delighted  
eager  
encouraged  
energetic

enthusiastic  
excited  
fascinated  
free  
fulfilled  
glad  
grateful  
happy  
hopeful  
inspired  
interested  
intrigued  
joyful  
lively  
marvelous  
motivated

moved  
optimistic  
peaceful  
playful  
pleased  
proud  
relaxed  
relieved  
safe  
satisfied  
strong  
surprised  
thankful  
thrilled  
touched  
trusting





## Needs and Values We All Have

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acceptance	freedom	privacy
achievement	friendship	progress
acknowledgement	fun	purpose
adventure	growth	reassurance
affection	harmony	recreation
appreciation	health	reliability
authenticity	help	respect
autonomy	honesty	rest, sleep
balance	hope	safety
beauty	humor	self-acceptance
celebration	inclusion	self-appreciation
choice	independence	self-determination
clarity	inspiration	self-esteem
closure	integrity	self-expression
comfort	intimacy	sexual expression
communication	justice	shared reality
community	knowledge	solitude
compassion	learning	space
confidence	leisure	spiritual expression
connection	love	stability
consideration	meaning	success
contribution	mourning	support
cooperation	mutuality	to belong
creativity	nurturance	to be heard
dignity	nutrition	to have our intentions understood
ease	order	to matter
emotional safety	participation	to be seen for who we are
empathy	patience	touch
empowerment	peace	trust
equality	physical security	understanding
exercise	play	well-being
fairness	power in our world	

**Examples of strategies often mistaken for needs:** attention, control, money, obedience, praise, punishment, punctuality, revenge, time, to be right.

## Examples of Literature Supporting the Four Steps in the Connection Process

### Step 1. Practice self-empathy (self-compassion)

Dougan, D. (2010). *Can you see the beauty? Nonviolent communication as counter narrative in the lives of former prisoners* (Order No. 3421627). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text. (753495651).

Immordino-Yang, M. H., & Damasio, A. (2007). We feel, therefore we learn: The relevance of affective and social neuroscience to education. *Mind, Brain, and Education*, 1(1): 3-10.

Lieberman, M. D., Eisenberger, N. I., Crockett, M. J., Tom, S. M., Pfeifer, J. H., & Way, B. M. (2007). Putting feelings into words: Affect labeling disrupts amygdala response to affective stimuli. *Psychological Science*, 18, 421-428.

Maslow, A. (1998). *Toward a psychology of being* (3rd Ed.). San Francisco, CA: Wiley

### Step 2. Practice empathy for others

Gerdes, K. E., Segal, E. A., Jackson, K. F., & Mullins, J. L. (2011). Teaching empathy: A framework rooted in social cognitive neuroscience and social justice. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 47(1), 109-131. doi:10.5175/JSWE.2011.200900085

Lamm, C. Batson, C. D. & Decety, J. (2007). The neural substrate of human empathy: Effects of perspective-taking and cognitive appraisal. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 19 (1), 42-58.

Rhee, S. H., Friedman, N. P., Boeldt, D. L., Corley, R. P., Hewitt, J. K., Knafo, A., & Zahn-Waxler, C. (2013). Early concern and disregard for others as predictors of antisocial behavior. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, 54(2), 157-166.

Sullivan, D. (2007). Nonviolence begins with speech: An interview with Emily Gaarder on the practice of Nonviolent Communication. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 10(1), 131-142. doi:10.1080/10282580601158032

### Step 3. Purposely become aware of a still, quiet, appreciative, non-judgmental place connecting your mind and heart.

Block-Lerner, J., Adair, C., Plumb, J. C., Rhatigan, D. L., & Orsillo, S. M. (2007). The case for mindfulness-based approaches in the cultivation of empathy: Does nonjudgmental, present-moment awareness increase capacity for perspective-taking and empathic concern? *Journal Of Marital & Family Therapy*, 33(4), 501-516. doi:10.1111/j.1752-0606.2007.00034.x

Hansen, R. (2013). *Hardwiring the brain: The new brain science of contentment, calm, and confidence*. Easton, PA: Harmony.

Johnson, R. M. (2015). *Completely connected: Uniting our empathy and insight for extraordinary results*. Irving Texas: Rasur Media.

Young, J. S., Cashwell, C. S., & Giordano, A. L. (2010). Breathwork as a therapeutic modality: An overview for counselors. *Counseling & Values*, 55(1), 113-125.

### Step 4. Being open to insights or solutions that surface.

Kounios, J. Beeman, M. (2015). *The eureka factor: Ah moments, creative insight and the brain*. NY: Random House.

McCraty, R., Atkinson, M., & Bradley, R. T. (2004). Electrophysiological evidence of intuition: Part 1. The surprising role of the heart. *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 10(1), 133-143.

Ritter, S. M., van Baaren, R.B. Dijksterhuis, A. (2012). Creativity: The role of unconscious processes in idea generation and idea selection. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 7(1). 21-27).