

Fuel for Motivation: The Impact of Empathy in an Educational Setting

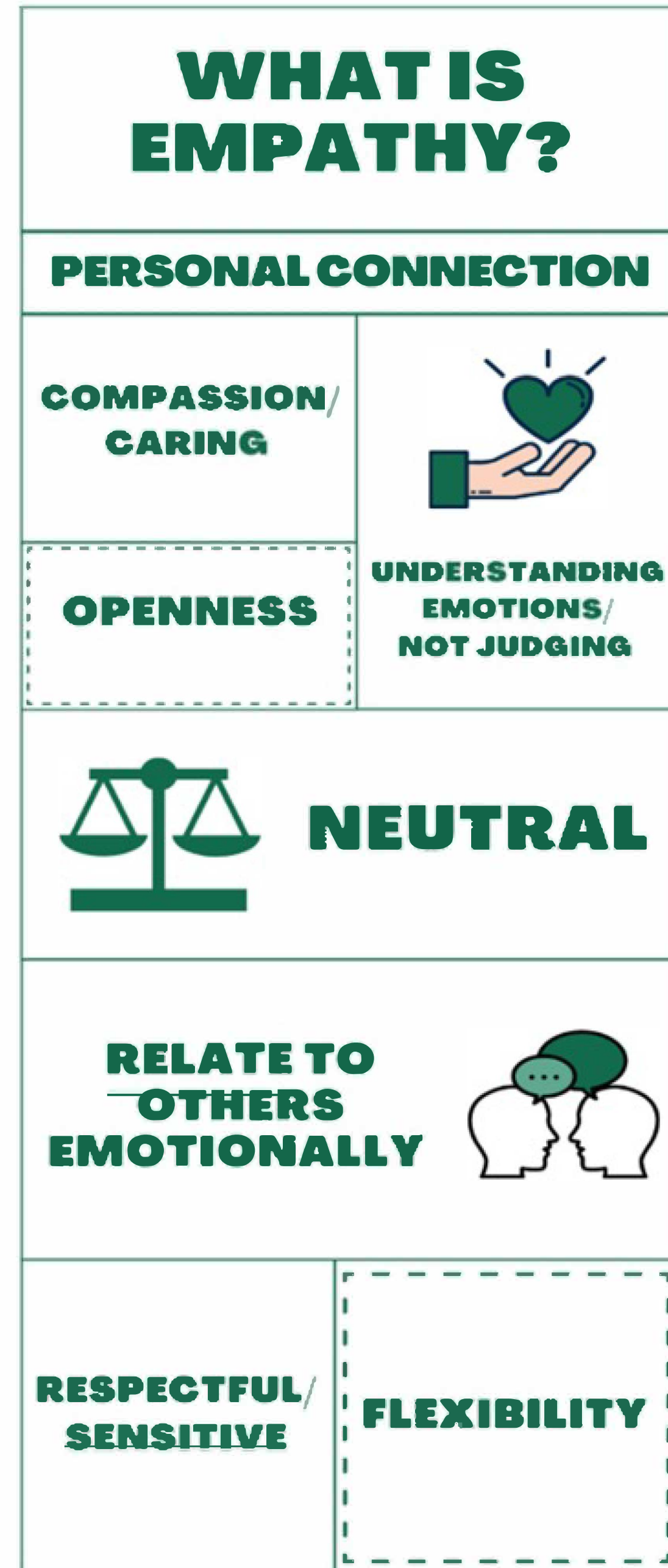
Meghan Cosby, Jen Ross, DCN, RDN, LDN, FAND, Andrea Arikawa, PhD, MPH, RD, LD/N, FAND, Kristen Hicks-Roof, PhD, RDN, LDN, CLC, FAND
 Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, University of North Florida, Jacksonville, FL USA 32224

INTRODUCTION

- ❖ According to Merriam Webster, empathy is defined as “the action of or capacity for understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another.”
- ❖ Research related to empathy has overlooked the relationship between instructor empathy and student outcomes choosing rather to focus on the importance of teaching empathy to students.
- ❖ Based on the assumption that people thrive in empathetic environments, an evidence-based correlation between faculty and student perceptions of empathy could be utilized to develop and improve upon pedagogical standards and student outcomes.
- ❖ The aim of this study was to explore the impact of empathy on motivation and student outcomes in a sample of students at the University of North Florida.

METHOD

- ❖ 6 focus groups were conducted via Zoom
- ❖ 19 students (4 males and 15 females)
- ❖ Questions asked pertained to the following:
 - ❖ Individual definitions of empathy
 - ❖ Traits of empathy in educators
 - ❖ Personal experiences of empathy with UNF instructors
 - ❖ Impact of empathy on coursework
 - ❖ Importance of empathy displayed by instructors
 - ❖ Opinions on the influence of instructor empathy on self-perceived success



“I retain more the information of what he's talking about so I'm better understanding of the course material”

RESULTS

Themes	Subthemes	Student Quotes
Students were able to define empathy and relate it to their University experience	Student experiences varied	“My instructors, definitely all of them practice empathetic listening”
Empathy is personal	Students identified a wide range of traits in instructors Empathy can be dependent on personal situations	“To be able to understand why they're feeling the emotions that they're feeling”
Empathy is extremely important in the classroom (& virtual) setting	Impacts motivation and perceived success Critical during stressful times such as the COVID-19 pandemic	“It is a big motivation for me with the quality of my work” “I think it also makes the bond between student and teacher better”

“It's not just compassion, but going the extra mile, and caring, and being considerate”

EMPATHETIC EDUCATOR TRAITS

CHECK-IN ON STUDENTS REGULARLY	ACKNOWLEDGE CURRENT EVENTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON STUDENTS' LIVES	BE AVAILABLE
USE EMPATHETIC NONVERBAL LANGUAGE SMILING, HEAD NODDING, ETC.	BE FLEXIBLE BUT MAINTAIN BOUNDARIES	RECOGNIZE HOW EVENTS (INCLUDING TECHNOLOGY GLITCHES) CAN IMPACT STUDENT LEARNING AND ADJUST ACCORDINGLY
CREATE A PERSONAL CONNECTION WITH STUDENTS	SHOW RESPECT FOR STUDENTS	PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE THROUGHOUT THE COURSE/CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK
BE A LEADER	POLL STUDENTS THROUGHOUT THE SEMESTER TO CHECK ON HOW THEY ARE DOING (CAN BE DONE ANONYMOUSLY)	BE PATIENT

CONCLUSION

- ❖ This study supports the idea that empathy is vital to educational outcomes.
- ❖ Students value instructors who display empathy.
- ❖ Empathy can motivate students and impact student outcomes.
- ❖ More research is needed to investigate the impact of empathy on student outcomes.