

Perspective-Taking Basics

The "Given what they've been through..." Frame

A simple way to practice empathy is to start your thoughts with: "Given what they've been through..." and then finish the sentence with something compassionate.

For example:

- "Given what they've been through at work this year, it makes sense that they are more guarded in meetings."
- "Given what they've been through in past relationships, it makes sense that trust takes time for them."
- "Given what they've been through with their health, it makes sense that they feel scared and tired."

This frame gently reminds you that people's reactions usually make sense in the context of their story.

A Simple 3-Step Perspective Exercise

Step 1: Notice your story.

Pause and notice what you are assuming about the other person: "They're overreacting," "They're being selfish," or "They do not care." Label this as your story, not the truth.

Step 2: Add their context.

Ask yourself: "Given what they've been through, what might be happening for them right now?" Consider their stress level, history, culture, identities, responsibilities, and past experiences with you.

You might guess: "They have been under a lot of pressure," "They grew up around yelling," or "They rarely feel listened to." You do not need to be perfectly right to become more compassionate.

Step 3: Choose an empathy-based response.

Ask: "If their feelings make sense in context, what would a kinder response look like?"

Options might include: asking one curious question, reflecting back what you heard ("It sounds like..."), saying "I get that this is important to you," or sharing your boundary calmly instead of reacting from defensiveness.

You can practice this in real time, or by journaling after a tough interaction: "What was my story? What might be their story? What would I like to do differently next time?"