

Reading Room

Want to keep learning about empathy and its many applications? 21 resources to get you started.

BOOKS

The Science and Cultivation of Empathy

1. [*Mirroring People: The New Science of How We Connect with Others*](#)

Author: Marco Iacoboni

Through this book, Iacoboni explains his research on mirror neurons in a way that is easily understandable. He looks at how our brains respond to others' actions almost as if they were doing those actions themselves.

2. [*Roots of Empathy: Changing the World Child by Child*](#)

Authors: Mary Gordon and Daniel J. Siegel

Discover the value of empathy and how it, along with social and emotional literacy in children, can best be nurtured. Empathy can help reduce aggression, antisocial behavior, and bullying in our school kids.

3. [*Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*](#)

Author: Daniel Goleman

Author of Emotional Intelligence, Goleman returns with encouraging words as he looks at the effects of rapport and supportive emotional interactions. His book helps readers understand social intelligence and provides insight in improving performance by improving organizational culture.

Social Commentary

4. [*The Parents We Mean to Be*](#)

Author: Richard Weissbourd

Weissbourd's book looks at the fundamental impacts parents have on their children's moral lives through original field research. He examines how a lack of self-awareness and missed priorities are negatively undermining children's development. Overall, the chaotic, yet intensely blissful process of raising a child can powerfully contribute to our own moral development.

5. [*The Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis*](#)

Author: Jeremy Rifkin

Rifkin demonstrates the great disconnect between our vision for the world and our ability to realize that vision lies in the current state of human consciousness. The human race struggles continually to "think globally and act locally". Through his book, Rifkin discusses how the way our brains are structured leads us to feel, think, and act in the world in ways that are no longer totally relevant to the new environments we have created for ourselves.

6. [*The Science of Evil: On Empathy and the Origins of Cruelty*](#)

Author: Simon Baron-Cohen

Many syndromes like narcissism, psychosis and Asperger's have one thing in common—they result in a lack of empathy. This absence can be dangerous, but in other cases, it can just result in different way of viewing the world. Baron-Cohen examines other social and environmental factors that can erode empathy, including neglect and abuse. This book will change how we perceive and treat human cruelty.

7. [*The Empathy Gap: Building Bridges to the Good Life and the Good Society*](#)

Author: J. D. Trout

How can we make better personal decisions and design social policies that improve the lives of everyone? Trout discusses the need to balance empathy with rationale if we are to develop a responsible social approach to democratic, decent policy-making. Trout offers insight on how we can improve society and the life of each individual.

8. [*Born for Love: Why Empathy Is Essential--and Endangered*](#)

Authors: Bruce D. Perry and Maia Szalavitz

This book combines perspectives from award-winning science journalist Maia Szalavitz and child-psychiatrist Bruce D. Perry as they explain how empathy develops, why it is essential both to human happiness and for a functional society, and what threats are presented today.

9. [*The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society*](#)

Author: Frans de Waal

This thought-provoking book examines how empathy comes naturally to many animals, including humans. De Waal's theory runs counter to the assumption that humans are inherently selfish. Through a better understanding of empathy's survival value in evolution, he suggests how we can work toward a more just society based on a more generous and accurate view of human nature.

10. [*Humanity on a Tightrope: Thoughts on Empathy, Family, and Big Changes for a Viable Future*](#)

Authors: Paul Ehrlich and Robert Ornstein

'Humanity on a Tightrope' focuses on what families and family values are, and how they often create an 'us versus them' mentality that is at the root of many of today's most crucial problems. They believe that spreading empathy can be a basic way to solve this human predicament by building on the findings of both social and natural science and using tools ranging from brain imaging to the internet.

11. [*A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*](#)

Author: Daniel Pink

Drawing on research from around the world, Pink outlines six fundamentally human abilities that are essential for professional success and personal fulfillment, and reveals how to master them. He discusses how the future belongs to the artists, inventors, storytellers-creative and holistic "right-brain" thinkers whose abilities mark the line between who gets ahead and who doesn't.

Education

12. [*The Soul of Education: Helping Kids find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School*](#)

Author: Rachael Kessler

This practical and inspirational sourcebook helps support school communities that are committed to preventing violence and alienation and producing responsible, caring citizens. By helping students find constructive ways to express their longings, their motivation to learn and stay in school can increase and ties to family and friends can become strengthened. Furthermore, they can approach adult life with vitality, character, and vision.

13. [*Teaching Empathy: A Blueprint for Caring, Compassion, and Community*](#)

Author: David A. Levine

This book provides educators with the tools to teach empathy to help create a culture of caring in their schools. Levine’s book is divided into four topics: teaching empathetically, learning empathy, living empathy and how to have courageous conversations.

14. [How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character](#)

Author: Paul Tough

The link between success and childhood is traditionally considered to be intelligence. However, Paul Tough argues that the qualities that matter most have more to do with character: skills like perseverance, curiosity, conscientiousness, optimism, and self-control. Tough uncovers the surprising ways in which parents succeed and fall short in preparing their children for adulthood, and how children can overcome challenges later in life by honing in on these character skills.

Business

15. [Wired to Care: How Companies Prosper When They Create Widespread Empathy](#)

Author: Dev Patnaik

Executives often know little about the people who buy their companies’ products and services. Most companies eliminate empathy from their operations; profits drive everything. This book shows why firms that connect empathetically with their customers do better financially. As Patnaik explains on his blog, “Empathy isn’t about having a visionary leader. It’s about making customer information an easy, everyday and experiential part of working at your company.”

ARTICLES

White Paper

16. [Building Positive School Culture: A White Paper on the Development of City Year's Behavior Initiative](#)

Published: October 2, 2009

Each year, over a million young people drop out of high school and the costs are extremely high. City Year has been developing a model for working with schools which is designed to help students stay on track and graduate. This paper provides a framework and theory of action for how City Year will work with schools to support student behavior and positive school culture.

Ashoka In the News

17. [Empathy in Action Report, July 2011](#)

Source: *Ashoka*

This report provides a summary of the accumulated and synthesized output from the Empathy In Action conference which included the participation of a dozen Ashoka Fellows from fields that range from peace-building to juvenile justice to engineering. This report captures key practices and strategies necessary for nurturing empathy, and to equip principals, teachers, parents and students with the tools they need to apply those practices.

18. [Bill Drayton on Empathy and Leadership](#)

Source: *Forbes India*

Bill Drayton shares his thoughts on the importance of empathy and its role in facilitating successful collaboration: “You can’t change the world if you can’t work really well with people.”

19. [Collaborative Entrepreneurship: How Social Entrepreneurs Have Learned to Tip the World by Working in Global Teams](#)

Source: *Ashoka, MIT Press*

Currently, the world is run by a select few elites, but Bill Drayton discusses the need for greater collaboration and teamwork with accelerated rates of change. Drayton encourages a new model where everyone is a changemaker.

20. [Don't Put Down That Book; It's Good For You!](#)

Source: *Huffington Post, August 28, 2011*

Since 2006, University of Toronto Professor Keith Oatley has led a research group investigating the question, “If stories are simulations of the social world, might we do better at understanding other people if we spent time engaging with fictional stories?” The answer, in short, is yes. An array of studies has shown that fiction readers perform better on tests of empathy (and, as Professor Oatley points out, it’s not because empathetic people read more fiction).

21. [Boy, Talk About a Good Book](#)

Source: *The New York Times, August 19, 2011*

In this New York Times essay, award-winning author of young adult fiction Robert Lipsyte explores the challenge and importance of getting boys to read. Reading is an



important empathy-building tool, but elementary school boys read significantly less than their female peers. With intense leisure-time competition from video games and ESPN, books can be a tough sell. According to Lipsyte, “boys need to be approached individually with books about their fears, choices, possibilities, and relationships — the kind of reading that will prick their dormant empathy, involve them with fictional characters and lead them into deeper engagement with their own lives.”