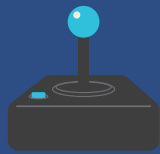


# EMPATHY

Feeling what others feel, imagining how they view and think about situations, and using that knowledge to guide your actions.

## EMPATHY IN GAMES

Empathy is foundational to who we are as humans. It helps us to connect with others and build strong relationships. Empathy means feeling what others feel, trying to look at things from their point of view, and using our knowledge of others to guide the way we treat them. Empathy can be harder to feel when there is an imbalance in power or resources, or when people (and characters) aren't seen as individuals but as mere numbers, part of a mass outgroup that's perceived as very different from "us." In those situations, we need to work harder to care about and do the right thing for others. Games might provide opportunities to practice empathy when they let players act from different points of view (play as multiple characters with different traits and perspectives), make progress by seeking out and understanding other characters' perspectives, play through difficult circumstances they might not encounter in real life (like war or disease), and have to make choices that could help or hurt others. How would your game encourage players to feel or use empathy?



### ELEMENTS TO ADD

- Require the player to play from more than one point of view, or require perspective taking to learn different sides to a situation.
- Use the game's subject matter to create understanding for specific circumstances.
- Build a strong central narrative that helps the player care about the world and its characters.
- Feelings travel faster than thoughts in the brain; building pauses into the narrative pacing could facilitate cognitive empathy.
- Reading emotions in others enhances empathy; offer dialogue choices that validate and reflect the feelings of other characters.
- Universal themes such as loss can be used to find common ground; many of people's most memorable gaming moments involve losing something that has become important.

### ELEMENTS TO LEAVE OUT

- Check and manage toxic player culture; offer real consequences for bad behavior and maintain a safe space for everyone.
- Cut down on gratuitous violence and the activity of killing for rewards.
- Heavily competitive and confrontational PvP free for alls increase the desire to "get" or "kill" someone else rather than the desire to understand, befriend, or be kind to them.
- Pay to win models ensure that there aren't any stakes that matter if you can cut to the finish by paying.



## GAME GENRES & TYPES

- Story
- Mystery games
- Multi-player Strategy
- MMO's and MOBA's
- Social Awareness

## NOTES

Lined area for taking notes, with a game controller icon in the top right corner.

## SPECIFIC MECHANICAL REFERENCES

- Empathy for characters and game creators may happen when someone makes a game about their own experiences in an effort to **help others understand** a condition, a situation, or a way of life such as Inuit culture in *Never Alone*, LGBT issues in *Gone Home* and *Dys4ia*, or health conditions like autism and cancer in *Max: An Autistic Journey* and *That Dragon, Cancer*.
- Empathy may come into play when you must **make choices while considering the impact** on other characters or at a cost to yourself, such as *The Walking Dead*, *This War of Mine*, *Undertale*, and *Papers, Please*.
- When players have the opportunity to **investigate more than one side of a story** in order to make a decision, that is perspective taking, which is necessary to empathy...like when you **choose sides in a feud** in *Knights of the Old Republic*, or when you **interview characters** in a detective game like *Nancy Drew*.
- In *To the Moon*, players must re-live scenes from the life of an old man in order to help him. The **emotional narrative** causes players to develop empathy for the character of the old man.
- In most single player RPG's like the *Dragon Age* and the *Persona* series, players are given an opportunity to complete quests that teach more about the companions. Players help the companion achieve some important goal or right an old wrong, and in the process, **learn about that character's life and view of the world**.
- In *1979: Revolution*, players learn about the civil war in Iran in the 1980's. As the main character, players must **make decisions that affect others**, and also, in a moment of perspective taking, must choose what to photograph and whether to turn over the photographs, when those might not be used in a way the player approves of.