

# Empathy Lessons from the Ocean

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Empathy is being able to put ourselves in other people's shoes and understand how they feel. There's so much we can learn about empathy from those who live in the ocean.



## The all seeing Seahorses

Did you know seahorses have some weird awesome eyes?

Each eye can see a different direction. Like one eye can see their friend coming from behind to tickle them and the other can keep watching The Game of Thrones on TV!

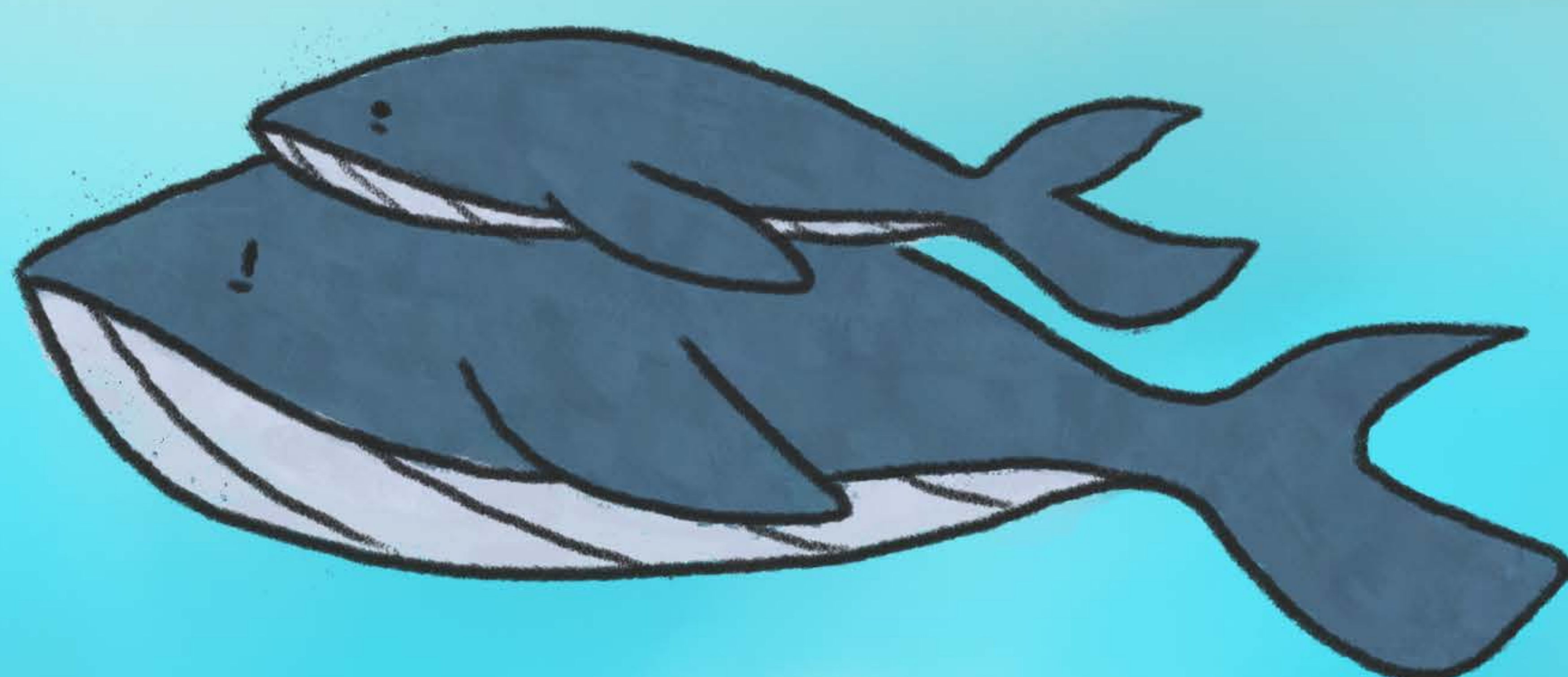
Wouldn't that make them very empathetic friends?

What we need in empathy is observation! Seeing others, paying attention to their feelings, who they are, what they need.

For example, you might notice that your friend looks confused, concerned, or anxious when you tell them about a new scientific discovery.

This is a good time to pause and ask them what their thoughts are or what they're thinking.

Observe to learn about others and from others. be a curious observer and look around...always...like the seahorse.



## The listening Whales

I'm sure we all have gone under water and tried to say FART...and your friend looks at you after, saying, "were trying to say BARF?" No? Just me? Ah cool cool cool.

Ok well...unlike us humans, whales are great at hearing things clearly under water and tell where those voices come from.

Sometimes in life, when we are overwhelmed with emotions and are sunked into our own thoughts, it's hard to hear...truly hear people out and realize where they are coming from. But listening is an important part of empathy. Being able to figure out "why" someone might feel a certain way, or make certain claims, requires listening.

For example, if you're talking to someone who avoids relying on scientific advice, instead of assuming their intentions, with good listening and asking the right questions you might realize that the defensiveness comes from a negative experience, concern for their child's health, or a scary story from their neighbor. Knowing these makes empathy and communication much easier.

So, be like whales, try to listen even when it's hard to and try to push yourself to learn where people come from.

## The Relatable Whale Shark

Am I a whale or a shark? I wonder if the gigantic, 18-33 ft shark goes to daily existential identity crises of who they are. But because of its size, the biggest fish in the water, the whale shark might have some empathy for whales.

Something that might make us feel distant from one another is thinking how different we are, but we all have things in common with each other. By finding those common grounds, we can try to relate to one another!

Imagine someone that you completely disagree with. Now think about what you have in common with them? Is it a job? Children? Religion? A similar experience of being worried, afraid, invisible?

We can all be more empathetic if we can realize that we have things in common, and this can be another way to start a conversation: from things we agree on.

So be like the Whale Shark, find your common grounds with whales.



## The Squid Who Felt It All

Which one of us did not wish to be able to change to ANY clothes in a heartbeat right?? RIGHT?? Well some squids have these tiny little balloon things filled with different colors and they can change color in a second.

So in some ways, these squids can do a great job putting themselves in other people's shoes!

Imagining what others might feel or think!

Maybe some bright yellow squid feels too flashy

while a blue one feels too sad. When we learn how to put ourselves in other people's shoes, we can become more understanding and empathetic. Sometimes when people disagree with us about scientific advice, for example, it's a good time to put ourselves in their shoes and think, why might they be doing that? What are their worries and concerns? And when we do that, we can communicate in ways that helps others feel seen and understood.

So just like a squid, let's prepare our color balloons, and try to think how others might feel or think.

## The Overreaching Man-o-War

Man-o-wars are probably one of the few species that are able to do a long distance high five. With some of their tentacles being up to 30 meters, they can reach pretty far. You might see a Man-o-war and think, oh that's just a man-o-war hanging out with its man-o-war friends, but actually man-o-wars can form a colony. They are one animal, each taking up a responsibility.

When being empathetic, it's important to reach out, to connect, and to show the other that we care.

Starting conversations with arguments, with "NO"s, and with scolding is the opposite of that. If you are talking to someone who might disagree with you or have beliefs that are not supported by science, start by reaching out to them, reflecting that you have been listening and can acknowledge their feelings.

After all, as the Persian poet Saadi says:

"Human beings are members of a whole,  
since in their creation they are of one essence.  
When the conditions of the time brings a member to pain,  
the other members will suffer from discomfort."

