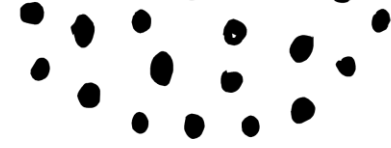




the incubator hub by Healthy Teen Network



Empathy & Insights: Quick Guide

Emily Connor, Laura Lloyd, and Patricia Natalie

Overview of Human-Centered Design

Human-Centered Design (HCD) is a powerful approach to problem-solving and innovation. It centers people at the heart of the design process, prioritizing their experiences throughout the development process. By emphasizing the needs of the people we're designing for, not the designer, we ensure that solutions are meaningful and impactful.

1. Inspiration: Rather than quickly going into problem-solving, we frame the problem by clarifying who we're addressing it for and why. Using deep empathy, we learn directly from the people we're designing for by immersing ourselves in their lives. As we come to deeply understand their needs, we might find that we aren't even looking at the right challenge and need to change direction—and that's okay!

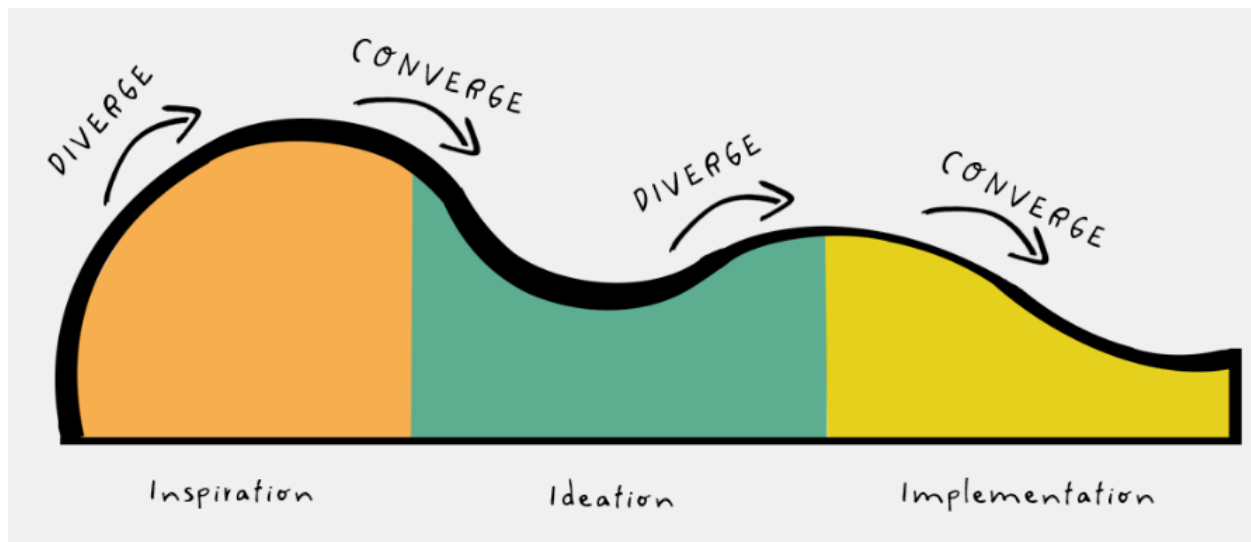
2. Ideation: After gathering insights, we make sense of what we learned, identify opportunities, and develop many ideas for solutions. We select a few that meet people's needs, seem feasible, and are sustainable. These are the ideas we build prototypes around for testing and feedback.

3. Implementation: Implementation is where we bring our solution to life! We build prototypes of our solutions, test them with our community, and revise as needed. Eventually, our solution makes it to the community. The process may not stop there—we may choose to keep iterating our solutions as people, time, and situations evolve. By keeping the very people we're looking to serve at the heart of the process, we have a higher chance of developing solutions that people will use and adapt.

Three Phases of Human-Centered Design (HCD)

HCD generally consists of three phases: inspiration, ideation, and implementation.

Through these three phases, our thinking rapidly shifts from *diverging* to *converging*. Diverging means thinking broadly and generating a large amount of data. Converging, on the other hand, refers to narrowing things down, focusing on what is most important, and deciding on concrete next steps. In the HCD process, we move back and forth between diverging and converging, likely a few times.



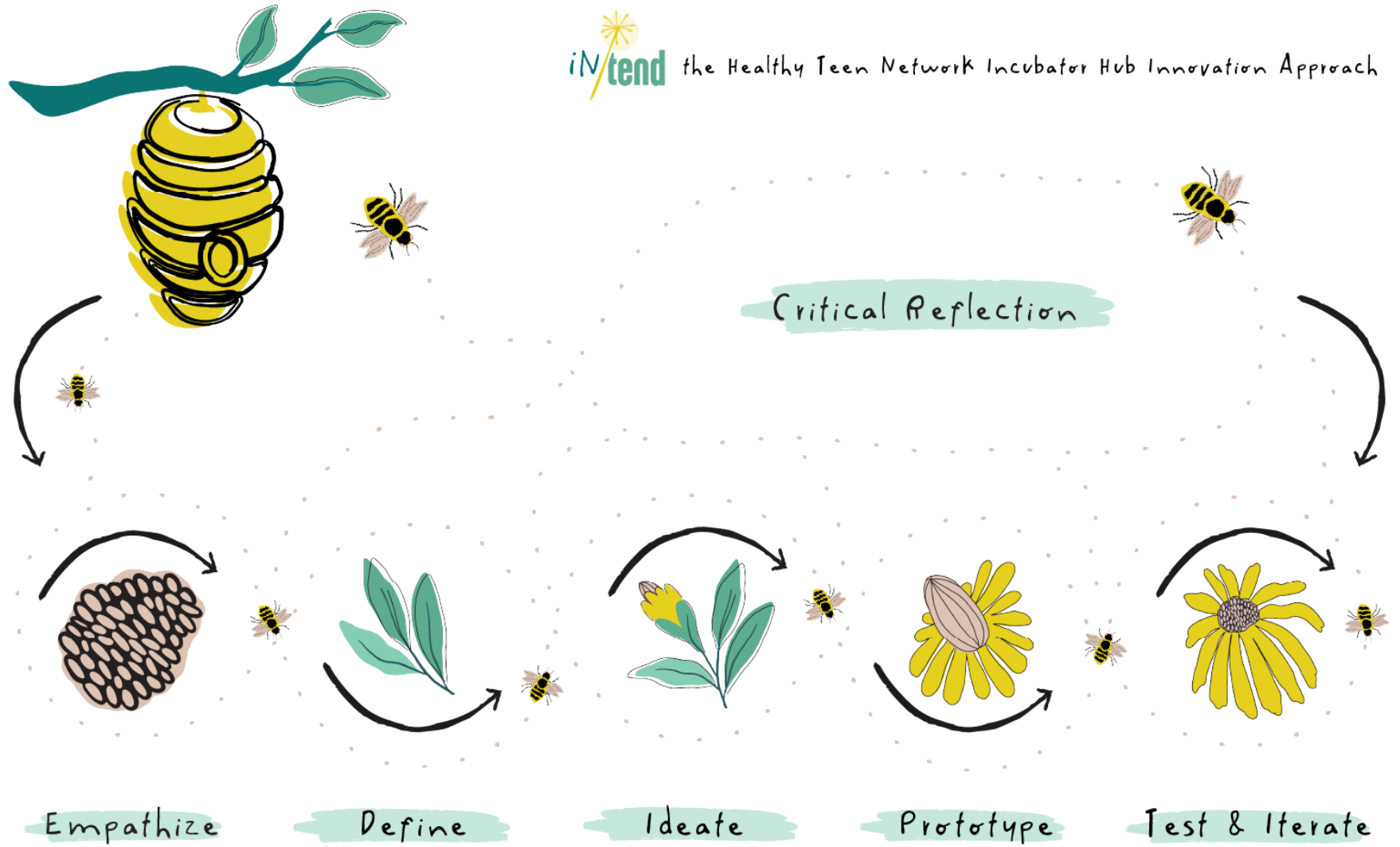
Three Phases of HCD

In/Tend Innovation Approach

In/Tend, an incubator hub by Healthy Teen Network, uses HCD principles in our innovation approach. Our HCD stages follow the Inspiration, Ideation, and Implementation framework by IDEO, a global design and innovation company known for its pioneering approach to HCD.

The visual below shows how the In/Tend innovation process flows as a cyclical, nature-inspired journey. Teams move through five phases—Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test & Iterate—with Critical Reflection woven throughout. Although each phase must be completed before moving to the next phase, the process may not follow a linear forward progression.





In/Tend Innovation Approach



Critical Reflection. We examine and reflect on underlying perspectives, unspoken norms, and structural influences that may shape the design process. We return to this phase throughout the process.



Empathize. We try to really get to know the people we are designing with by gathering information about their experiences, needs, and challenges. We conduct research to discover their needs and goals, pain points and challenges, behaviors and motivations, emotional states and attitudes, expectations and preferences, and strengths and assets.



Define. We articulate the challenge we want to address, refine our existing challenge, or in some cases, largely revamp the challenge based on what we learn from the Empathize phase. We identify the systems and structures that contribute to the challenge and ask ourselves questions like, “Who benefits from this challenge going unaddressed? What biases or assumptions are embedded in the challenge statement?”



Ideate. We participate in several brainstorming activities to spur new, creative ideas. The goal is to first generate a wide range of potential solutions (quantity over quality)! Then, we narrow down those ideas based on how feasible they are to create, how desirable they are in for our end-users, and how viable they are in the community.



Prototype. We create tangible prototypes of one or more of the ideas we generate during the previous phase, using various prototyping approaches such as sketches, storyboarding, and digital mockups. Prototypes are tangible representations of our ideas, serving as a low-fidelity, preliminary versions of our solutions. They help us validate assumptions and gain insights into how something might work without fully building it.



Test & Iterate. We test prototypes and gather user feedback to assess the usefulness of our solution. As we find what works and what doesn't, we move from lower- to higher-fidelity prototypes. Throughout testing, we develop plans outlining what will be tested and what testing methods we'll use to test. We'll also learn how to create a safe and respectful testing environment, document findings, and share results.

In/Tend Innovation Mindsets

These key mindsets help us approach challenges with creativity, curiosity, and humility:

Open-Mindedness.

Be adaptable to change and explore unconventional ideas. Sometimes the best solutions come from unexpected ideas. For example, a clinic improved patient flow by allowing text message check-ins, an initially unconventional idea that improved patient flow after further exploration.

Self-Awareness.

Recognize our position in society to minimize biases and assumptions. Self-awareness helps us approach problems with humility, curiosity, and courage. For example, when working on a project in a community we're not part of, be aware of our outsider perspective, ask better questions, and truly listen.

Balance & Safety.

Break down power dynamics and make space for all voices—especially those that are often overlooked. For example, in a cafeteria redesign project, IDEO worked with students to co-create the cafeteria experience, resulting in a more welcoming design that met the needs of all students.

Empathy.

See the world through someone else's eyes to understand their needs, feelings, and experiences. For example, designers who shadow nurses during a hospital shift might discover that clunky equipment layouts were slowing down care—something only visible by walking in the nurses' shoes.

Embracing Ambiguity.

Trust the process and accept that we don't always know the answer right away. For example, Netflix didn't have a clear blueprint for transitioning to streaming. They experimented and transformed how we watch TV today.

Creative Confidence.

Push through self-doubt with courage. Moments of discomfort during the design process are where growth happens. For example, we might hesitate to sketch our ideas because we didn't think we were creative. Creative confidence is learning that simple visuals can help communicate, collaborate, and solve problems. Creativity isn't about being an artist—it's about thinking differently.

Perfect is the Enemy of Good.

Aim to get quick and rough prototypes into users' hands because early feedback is more valuable than a polished product. For instance, when the Dyson vacuum was first prototyped, it went through over 5,000 versions, each teaching something new.

Learn from Failure.

Failure is not something to fear, but a natural and valuable part of the process. Focus on what we can learn from every try. For example, the original idea for Post-it Notes came from a failed attempt to create a super-strong adhesive. That 'failure' became a staple because someone was open to a new use for it.



Empathy

This stage is about understanding the people you're designing for—not just their behaviors, but their experiences, emotions, and motivations. Unlike traditional research, it focuses on connecting with people on a human level to gain insights. The Empathy stage is not about finding immediate solutions; it's about curiosity, deep listening, and uncovering unexpected truths. It's like peeling back layers to reveal what truly matters to your users.

Who do we work with?

Users: People who directly engage with what you're designing.

Beneficiaries: People who benefit from the solution without directly engaging with it.

Stakeholders: People or groups who have a vested interest in the success or impact of the solution.

Methods for empathizing with end-users



One-on-one Interviews: Ask open-ended questions to understand someone's story. Create a safe and comfortable environment where people feel free to share their experiences, challenges, and hopes. Instead of yes-or-no questions, encourage people to open up by asking, "Can you describe a typical day when managing X?" or "What's the hardest part of dealing with Y?"



Group Interviews: Group settings can reveal perspectives that go beyond those of one-on-one interviews. Participants build on each other's ideas, highlighting shared experiences or differences. For example, a group interview with parents might reveal patterns such as "We all feel overwhelmed with communication from school," as well as how parents cope in unique ways.



Card Sort: Ask participants to organize cards with phrases, words, or pictures on them, and to talk about why they are putting the cards where they are. This activity helps us both see and hear what's most important to them. This activity prompts people to prioritize, which can reveal what they care about, such as finding someone who values 'simplicity' over 'features,' which can influence our design decisions.





Extremes and Mainstreams: Seek out diverse perspectives from people who fall at both ends of the spectrum, beyond the ‘average’ user. For example, when redesigning public transportation, interview someone who uses public transit every day and someone who avoids it completely. Extreme users often uncover edge cases that inspire innovative ideas.



Guided Tour: Have participants show us their environment and explain how they use it. For example, if we’re designing tools for teachers, we visit their classrooms and have them walk us through their setup and daily routines. It’s one thing for a teacher to say, ‘I’m always running out of space,’ and another to see the cluttered shelves and stacks of papers they’re dealing with.



Peers Observing Peers: Observing natural interactions between peers, such as coworkers collaborating or teens hanging out, can reveal unspoken dynamics, habits, or challenges. For instance, we might notice that coworkers prefer sticky notes to email, inspiring ideas for better team tools.



Power Mapping: Visualizing relationships between people, organizations, or systems can reveal influence and potential gaps. For example, when designing a community health program, we might realize that certain local leaders have strong influence but aren’t currently involved. We can then leverage those connections.



Collage: Collaging is a creative way to express feelings or ideas visually. We provide participants with magazines, scissors, and glue, and ask them to create a collage on a given topic. For example, while designing a product for stress relief, a collage might reveal that people associate stress with certain colors, images, or symbols, providing insights into their emotional world.



Photojournal: Ask participants to document their experiences through photos. For example, to learn about how people cook at home, have them take pictures of their kitchen, tools, and meals. An unfiltered look into their lives can reveal details they might not mention, like cluttered countertops or how they organize spices.



Analogous Inspiration: Explore how similar experiences work in different contexts. For example, when redesigning a hospital waiting room, we might draw inspiration from how high-end hotels create welcoming lobbies. The point isn’t to copy what works in another context, but to adapt the principles to our own.



Insights

What are insights?

1. Insights go beyond observations or data points. They're not just what you see on the surface, but what lies underneath. They uncover the 'why' behind what people do or feel. For example, it's not just knowing *what* someone struggles with, but understanding *why* that struggle exists and how it impacts their lives.
2. Insights are the bridges between piles of data—sticky notes, interview transcripts, survey responses—and actionable strategies that make a real difference.

What makes an insight great?

Quality	Description	Example
Surprising	Challenges assumptions or conventional wisdom, revealing unexpected truths.	<i>Teens care deeply about privacy, but they define it differently. For them, privacy means controlling who sees specific content rather than keeping everything private.</i>
Sticky and memorable	Sticks with the audience through vivid language and strong emotion.	<i>For many young people who experience discrimination because of why they are or who they love, the clinic isn't just a place for health care—it feels like walking into a battlefield where they have to defend who they are.</i>
Universal yet personal	Identifies patterns from individual stories that reflect broader truths.	<i>Many people avoid healthcare services because they feel disempowered and dismissed in conversations with providers, leading to distrust and delayed care-seeking behaviors.</i>
Reframing	Shifts perspectives on a problem to uncover new solutions.	<i>Young adults are less concerned with the clinical benefits of contraception and more motivated by how it aligns with their lifestyle and personal values. Framing contraception as a tool for achieving life goals may be more effective than focusing solely on the medical benefits.</i>
Actionable	Provides a clear direction for innovation.	<i>Young adults prefer sexual health information presented through interactive, gamified tools rather than text-heavy resources.</i>



How do we craft an insight?

Include the following elements:

- **Intended audience:** Who are we designing for? Be specific (e.g., teens, student parents, teachers, parents, healthcare workers).
- **Action, behavior, feeling, or situation:** What did we observe, hear, or learn about their actions, behaviors, or feelings? Describe what they do, feel, or experience.
- **Underlying reason or motivation:** Why do they act, behave, or feel this way? Get to the emotional or practical root cause.
- **Restriction, obstacle, or friction:** What challenges or limitations are hindering the target audience from achieving their goal?
- *(If applicable)* **Implication/opportunity for design:** What does this mean for our design challenge? What opportunity does this reveal?

Use this template to craft an insight:

_____ (*intended audience*)
_____ (*action, behavior, feeling, or situation*)
because _____ (*underlying reason or motivation*),
but _____ (*restriction, obstacle, friction*).

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