

Empathetic Listening Strategies

PURPOSE

Empathetic listening helps support the development of trusting relationships through committed attention, nonjudgment, and probing to understand.

DIRECTIONS:

Use the strategies below to engage in empathetic listening with students, families/caregivers, and other adults.

Listen without interrupting

Listening without interruption signals to your partner that you are fully committed to holding space for them.

This looks like:

- *Allowing for silence and pauses*
- *Taking cues from your partner (e.g., a longer pause, asking a question, signaling they are finished) to determine when to respond*

Be aware of your tone and body language

Signal active listening and empathy with nonverbal cues.

This looks like:

- *Turning your body fully towards your partner with your arms uncrossed*
- *Sitting close enough that your partner can share without projecting across the room, while maintaining personal space*
- *Nodding or other nonverbal reactions as you listen*
- *Matching the tone of your voice/expression to the situation*

Ask open-ended questions

You might ask open-ended questions that encourage your partner to share more about the situation or what they were thinking and feeling.

This sounds like:

- *"Can you say more about ___?"*
- *"What was that like for you?"*
- *"How did you feel in the moment? How do you feel now?"*

Use reflecting language

Show that you hear and understand your partner by reflecting back what you've heard them say, and how they are feeling.

This sounds like:

- *"It sounds like [summary of what happened] – is that right?"*
- *"So [summary of what happened] – what happened next?"*
- *"It seems like you felt ___ when that happened, because ___."*
- *"I can see/imagine/understand why you would feel ___."*

Be willing to sit in discomfort

Avoid jumping to solutions or immediately responding with the "silver lining." This can signal to the speaker that their stress or emotions are invalid or easily changeable, or that they make you uncomfortable.

This looks like:

- *Defaulting to reflecting language*
- *Moving into problem-solving only after fully discussing the challenge, or if explicitly asked*

Reflection: What happens when I practice empathetic listening with others?