



Being an Empathetic Listener

Empathetic listening happens when one responds to their conversation partner in ways that can increase shared understanding and trust.

Characteristics of empathetic listening include:

- Acknowledging your conversation partner by facing them during conversation
- Resisting distractions
- Noting verbal and nonverbal communication of your conversation partner (ex: being aware of the language they use and the gestures they use)
- Being empathetic to the speaker's expressed thoughts and feelings

Focusing Skills: Focusing on/being attentive to the person you are helping

- Maintain and maximize eye contact (note: in some cultures, making direct eye contact is uncomfortable)
- React responsively to each situation
- Employ "I" language instead of "you" language (ex: "I felt...when you...because...")

Encouraging Skills: Encouraging/motivating your conversation partner to talk

- Repeat what is said to encourage more elaboration
- Ask questions that require more than a yes/no answer
- Demonstrate your genuine interest in what is said (ex: ask relevant questions)

McLean, S. (2005). *The Basics of Interpersonal Communication* (pp. 37). Boston: Pearson/A and B.

Cuny, K.M., Wilde, S.M. & Stevens, A.V. (2012). Using empathetic listening to build relationships at the center. In Yook, E. & Atkins Sayre, W. (Eds.), *Communication Centers and Oral Communication Programs in Higher Education: Advantages, Challenges, and New Directions* (pp. 249-256). Lanham, MD: Lexington

Reflecting Skills: Reflecting the other speaker's perspective

- Summarize and paraphrase what you have heard
- Be non-evaluative when offering interpretations of feelings
- Provide personal examples

Nonverbal Behaviors which Compliment Empathetic Listening

The SOFTEN technique offers a set of behaviors that can communicate one is listening to their conversation partner.

S – Smiling

O – Open posture

F – Forward lean

T – Taking notes

E – Eye contact

N – Nodding

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