

Fold me

“Empathy is seeing with
the eyes of another,
listening with the ears of
another and feeling with
the heart of another.”
- Alfred Adler



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Practice Empathic Listening

Empathic listening allows us to step inside the speaker's story to feel their emotions. It provides a safe place to work through complicated emotions. Empathic listening seeks to get inside the other person's perspective and see the world the way they do. It refrains from making judgments or negating what the speaker is saying. To prepare for empathic listening, you should quiet your mind in order to focus fully on what the other is saying, listening fully and openly. This skill requires the listener to use their eyes, ears, and heart to listen. Not every conversation requires empathic listening. Empathic listening is most helpful when the topic is crucial, meaningful, or substantial. It is also effective when emotions are running high, when either party doesn't feel understood, or when there is low trust in the relationship. To prepare for empathic listening, Leal (2017) proposes ideas such as quieting the mind in order to focus fully on what the other is saying, listening fully and openly, and listening through the words.

The Four Stages of Empathic Listening

Stage 1: Mimicking content

This is the least effective stage of listening taught in active or reflective listening courses.

Stage 2: Rephrasing the content

This is somewhat more effective but remains limited to the verbal portion of communication.

Stage 3: Reflecting feelings

This stage includes not only what was said, but how the speaker feels about it.

Stage 4: Rephrasing content and reflecting feelings

This stage incorporates both the second and third stages and draws the speaker closer to the listener, reassuring them they are in a safe space.

According to Michael Sorensen, author of *I Hear You: The Surprisingly Simple Skill Behind Extraordinary Relationships*, "The truly good listeners of the world do more than just listen. They listen, seek to understand, and then validate. Sorensen states that the third point, validating the emotions of the speaker, is the secret sauce—the magic ingredient".

Validating emotions demands the listener's full attention and observation. The listener must listen to the words and observe the body language of the speaker. Mirroring excited responses with micro-validations like "really" and "that makes sense" also show empathic listening.

Empathic awareness skills

1. Recognize the inherent dignity and value in myself as well as the speaker.
2. Instill a personal desire to want to listen to others.
3. Think of positive qualities of the other person.

Empathic listening skills

1. Transform my listening skills and quiet my mind.
2. I will listen through the words, fully and openly.
3. I vow not to interrupt people.
4. Say back to the speaker what they said to me, capturing the emotion.

Another way to practice empathic listening is to project yourself into the other person's life, which includes suspending your own ego and judgment. It requires centering yourself with the focus being to listen and to be fully present. In addition to supporting the speaker, the empathic listener creates connection by listening, identifying feelings, and allowing the speaker to find solutions. Empathic listeners know how important it is for speakers to both own and solve their own issues. Here are some sample questions that help facilitate this. Not every question is appropriate for every situation.

Empathic Listening Questions

1. "You seem upset. Do you want to talk?"
2. "Tell me what happened."
3. "What can I do for you?"
4. "That sounds really hard."
5. "How can I best support you?"
6. "What do you need right now?"

Empathic listening is the embodiment of connection and a foundation for healing hurting people. It requires us to stop thinking about what we need from the conversation and causes us to turn towards the speaker and consider what they need in the moment. It sends the message that you care. As Maya Angelou said, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

Source: <https://positivepsychology.com/empathic-listening/>