

Empathetic Listening and Responding

Empathetic listening occurs when a person feels as though they are being really understood. Listening is different than hearing.

Most of us (probably all of us) were not listened to well, especially when we experienced strong feelings of anger, suffering, grief, and hopelessness.

Here are a few tips which will help you become a better empathetic listener and thereby establish better relationships and working conditions for yourself and the person you are working with:

1. Be interested in and fully attentive to what the person is saying. Let them know of your interest by looking directly at them in a relaxed and friendly manner. Paying attention in this way takes practice.
2. Don't interrupt with ideas of your own. If you are reminded of things in your own life which seem important to share, don't share them. Be patient for your turn to share, and ask permission.
3. Don't give unsolicited advice or suggestions unless you are asked. And even then, think twice before giving it. Respect the person's ability to think and solve their own problems. Believe in the self determination theory.
4. If the person is upset, don't try to get them to be logical, to think. Let them know you feel for them by using empathy. Let an upset person know that their feelings and thoughts are okay. Logic can occur after the upset has subsided.
5. Don't ask questions for information to satisfy your own curiosity.
6. Don't withdraw or distract the person from what they are trying to communicate. Avoid making comments or jokes that distract the attention away from the person's process.
7. Stay calm. Relax. Two upset people are not better than one. You can show caring without getting upset yourself. This takes practice.
8. Notice your conversation if you are feeling frustrated. State your irritation or frustration or use silence to calm yourself. Be authentic.