

Guidelines for Empathetic Listening

A Quick Guide

1. **Be attentive. Create a positive atmosphere through nonverbal behavior. When you are alert, attentive, nondistracted, and have eye contact, the other person feels important and more positive.**
2. **Be interested in the other's needs. Remember, you are there to listen with understanding.**
3. **Listen from the "OK-OK" attitude.**
4. **Be a sounding board; allow the speaker to bounce ideas and feelings off of you while you assume a nonjudgmental, noncriticizing manner.**
5. **Don't ask lots of questions. Remember, questions can come across as if the person is being "grilled."**
6. **Act like a mirror. Reflect back what you think the other is feeling and/or saying to you.**
7. **Because they discount the person's feelings, don't use stock phrases such as:**
 - *"Oh! It's not that bad."*
 - *"You'll feel better tomorrow."*
 - *"It will blow over; don't be so upset."*
 - *"You shouldn't feel that way – it's not a big deal."*
 - *"You're making a mountain out of a molehill."*
8. **Don't let the other person "hook" you. This can happen when you get angry, hurt, or upset, allow yourself to become involved in an argument, jump to conclusions, or pass judgment on the other person.**
9. **Other ways to indicate you are listening:**
 - a. Encouraging, noncommittal acknowledgments
 - *"Hum."*
 - *"Uh-huh."*
 - *"I see."*
 - *"Right."*
 - *"Oh!"*
 - *"Interesting."*
 - b. Nonverbal acknowledgments
 - Head-nodding

- Facial expression matching what the speaker is saying
 - Body expression or movement that is relaxed and open
 - Eye contact
 - Touching
- c. Door-openers, or invitations to say more
- *“Tell me about it.”*
 - *“I’d like to hear what you’re thinking.”*
 - *“Would you like to talk about it?”*
 - *“Let’s discuss it.”*
 - *“Sounds like you’ve got some ideas or feelings about this.”*
 - *“I’d be interested in what you have to say.”*

10. Ground Rules

- a. Don’t interrupt.
- b. Don’t take the subject off in another direction.
- c. Don’t get into internal distractions.
- d. Don’t interrogate.
- e. Don’t preach.
- f. Don’t give advice.
- g. Do reflect back to the speaker what you observe and how you believe the speaker feels.