

Reflective Practice

Tips

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Empathetic listening is an awesome medication for the hurting heart.

Gary Chapman

Empathic listening

Use this tip sheet to deepen your listening skills. Reflect as a group on the qualities of empathic listening when setting up a reflective practice group's ways of working.

Empathic listening implies a willingness not to judge, evaluate, or criticise but rather to be an accepting, permissive, and understanding listener.

Becoming an empathic listener requires focusing on the following guidelines:

- » A greater emphasis on listening than on talking.
- » Responding to that which is personal rather than abstract.
- » Following the other in their exploration rather than leading into areas you think they should be exploring.
- » Clarifying what the other person has said about their own thoughts and feelings rather than asking questions or telling them what you believe he should be thinking, seeing, or feeling.
- » Responding to the feelings implicit in what the other has said rather than the assumptions or “content” that has been talked about.
- » Trying to get into the other person's inner frame of reference rather than listening and responding from our own frame of reference.
- » The speaker is more apt to keep talking (vs. defending, blaming, shutting down, or withdrawing). This can build trust, intimacy, and relationships, over time.

Underpinning the guidelines for empathic listening is the ability to be present.

By expanding your cognitive and sensory awareness and tuning in to others' needs, you help people feel seen, understood and valued. There are three aspects of being truly present:

1. Cognitive awareness

- » **Check in** – Choose how you want to show up and be aware of your mindset and create a positive frame of mind for the interaction
- » **Be curious** – Ask questions that help them explore the issue, challenge and solution
- » **Suspend judgment** – Don't tell yourself stories, jump to conclusions or get into 'fix-it' mode

2. Sensory Awareness:

- » **Observe emotions in self** – Recognise emotional reactions and physical sensations
- » **Observe emotions in others** – Listen for the emotion behind the words and observe non-verbal cues
- » **Set your intention** – Decide how you want to be experienced as a person

3. Tuning in to others:

- » **Respect** – Being treated with respect is one of the strongest predictors of positive feelings
- » **Regard for others** – Reflect on how you are valuing those you are with
- » **Discover** – Listen deeply for what others need from you