

Session Four: Displaying Empathy

Session Outcomes

Through this session participants will be able to:

- Describe key components of empathy
- Identify behaviors of active listening
- Practice and apply concepts of active and empathetic listening
- Distinguish between empathetic and non-empathetic responses
- Develop empathetic responses to statements

Materials Needed

Virtual:

- PowerPoint Slide Deck
- Jamboard
- *Active Listening* Handout as PDF
- *E is for Empathy* YouTube Video (2 minutes, 30 seconds):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_1Rt1R4xbM
- *Brené Brown on Empathy* YouTube Video (3 minutes):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>
- *It's Not About the Nail* YouTube Video (1 minute, 40 seconds):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4EDhdAHrOg>

In-Person:

- PowerPoint Slide Deck
- Whiteboard or flipchart paper and lots of markers
- Note cards – one for each participant

Note: This material and accompanying handouts and resources were developed by Dr. Paige Haber-Curran for the University of Minnesota's Office for Multicultural Student Engagement. For permission to use this material for other purposes please contact Paige at paige.haber@gmail.com.

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Part 1: Introduction to Capacity (5 minutes)

Begin the session by showing the short video *E is for Empathy* (2 minutes, 30 seconds). This is a clip from Sesame Street about Empathy- it is lighthearted but also makes the concept very relatable.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_1Rt1R4xbM

Ask students for reactions from the short video, and ask them if Empathy is something any of them have been taught before -whether in school, workshops, or even through TV shows like Sesame Street.

Share the slide ***Displaying Empathy***, which is the definition of the capacity, and ask a participant to read the slide aloud:

Being emotionally in tune with others. Empathy is about perceiving and addressing the emotions of others. Emotionally intelligent leaders place a high value on the feelings of others and respond to their emotional cues.

Talking Points:

We have probably all heard the phrase “walk a mile in their shoes” before, and although even if we do walk a mile in their shoes, we cannot truly know what someone else’s experience is. We can, though, gain a deeper and better understanding- and through this a deeper connection with the person. This is particularly important with people

who are important in our lives, such as friends and family – and also with those whom we work and lead.

Part 2: Brené Brown on Empathy (15 minutes)

Show the short video *Brené Brown on Empathy* (3 minutes) and ask students to jot down anything from the video that sticks out to them as important:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>

Once the video is finished, ask participant to share in groups of two or three what stuck out to them. Then, bring the whole group together and ask for insights from the video- jot these down on a board, flipchart paper, or on a blank PowerPoint slide.

Display the slide ***Brené Brown on Empathy*** and briefly overview some of the key takeaways from her video about empathy, connecting these key points to what the students shared.

- *Perspective taking- recognizing one's perspective as their truth*
- *Staying out of judgment*
- *Recognizing emotion in others*
- *Communicating that emotion*
- *"Feeling with people"*
- *The power and importance of connection*

Additional Talking Points:

Empathy is about:

- *Hearing what others are saying & what they are feeling – the emotional messages behind the words*
- *Understand what they are going through from their perspective- not your own*
- *Seek to understand- not to fix them or the problem*

Like all of the other capacities we have focused on in these sessions, empathy is something that can be learned and developed. We can

become better listeners and develop our ability to understand and “feel with” others. Some people may have an inherent or innate talent for empathy, so it may come easier for them, but it is something that we all can develop- and should develop if we have relationships and interactions with other people (all of us!).

Part 3: What is Active Listening? (15 minutes)

This part of the session will focus on active, empathic listening.

Talking Points and Instructions:

Think about a time when you felt truly heard and understood by another person. This person was truly listening and you could tell that they cared and they were trying to understand what you were feeling. What did that person do? Jot down what comes to mind about what that person did or how they “showed up.” (Allow students about 3 minutes to do this).

Now, think of a time when you felt like you weren’t heard or understood by another person- perhaps you felt shut out or that the person really wasn’t trying to understand how you were doing. What did that person do? Jot down what comes to mind about what that person did or how they “showed up.” (Allow students about 3 minutes to do this).

Ask students to pair up with another person and have them share their experiences with the two different situations and what that person did and/or how they “showed up.” Allow about 5 minutes for this discussion. Then ask for a few students to share any insights or key themes from their discussions with the larger group.

Talking Points/Discussion Prompt:

We all know that being a good listener is important, but common sense is not the same thing as common practice. Being a good listener is something that we can all improve on.

What are some barriers to active listening?

(Here are some you can add if students don't mention them: planning a response when the speaker is talking, listening for what you want to hear rather than what is being said, technology, lack of interest)

Pass out (or post in the chat) the *Active Listening* handout. Ask students to review the directions and to complete the handout, placing a check mark next to the behaviors they often use and an X next to behaviors that they don't use very often.

Discussion Questions:

*What did you notice about yourself as you filled out this worksheet?
Are there any behaviors you think could be added to this list?
What do you think makes active listening empathetic as opposed to just active?*

Part 4: Practicing Empathetic Listening (20 minutes)

This part of the session will allow participants to practice engaging in empathetic listening.

Instructions:

Think of a difficult situation or experience that you have faced that had an emotional impact on you. Maybe it was an interpersonal conflict, a challenge that seemed daunting, or another situation that resulted in strong feelings.

Pair up. One person will go first and will share with the other person this situation or experience. The person should talk for about 5 minutes. During this time the other person should be practicing active, empathetic listening. That person should be really trying hard to understand what that person is/was feeling and what their experience was. Further, through this, try to build connection. The listener can ask questions, but really seek to keep the focus on the person who is sharing. I'll let you know when this first round of sharing is complete.

When it's been about 5 minutes, ask the pairs to wrap up their discussion. Then, instruct them to switch roles and do it again. At about 5 minutes ask the pairs to wrap up their discussion. Encourage the pairs to thank each other for sharing and for listening. If you are doing this virtually you can broadcast messages to breakout rooms.

Then, in pairs, ask the students to share with each other what the experience was like. Display the slide ***Empathetic Listening Debrief*** and ask the pairs to spend about 5 minutes discussing these prompts:

When sharing:

- *What was it like to be the person sharing?*
- *What did it feel like?*
- *What did your partner do well? What could they improve on?*

When listening:

- *What was it like to be the person listening?*
- *What came easy to you? What was challenging?*
- *What might you try to do better or differently next time?*

After about 5 minutes, bring the large group back together. Ask participants what some key takeaways are from this activity. What can they work on to continue to develop their capacity to be an empathetic listener?

Part 4: Empathetic Responses (15 minutes)

This part of the session will focus on thinking about how we can respond to people in empathetic ways.

Talking Points:

As we saw in the activity we just did on empathetic listening, we can really make an impact on others by truly seeking to understand others and “feel” with others. This type of activity and listening can involve some considerable time, which we don’t always have. We can also practice empathy in our everyday interactions with others.

In this next activity we are going to focus on how we can provide empathetic responses to others. This is particularly important when we are leading a group or in a role when we are trying to help support others.

Display the slide **Activity: Empathetic and Non-Empathetic Responses¹**.

Example: "I totally bombed that test."

- *Example response (non-empathetic)- I'm sure you did fine.*
- *Example response (empathetic)- What makes you think that?*

1. *"I don't belong here."*
2. *"I'm totally stressed out about the event tomorrow."*
3. *"I have no idea how to tell my parents."*
4. *"I am so frustrated with her that I just want to quit my position."*
5. *Choose your own statement and response*

Instructions:

We have the power to choose how we respond to people- and how we do so can make a difference in how the person feels, what they think, and what their behaviors are. Further, how we respond can affect our relationship with others. Notice the example statement and responses here. What do you see as a difference between the two responses?

(Things to note/emphasize if students don't mention them: an empathetic response invites conversation and connection- and acknowledges how that person feels; a non-empathetic response isn't mean or cruel, but it does sever connection and can make someone feel dismissed or not heard.)

Now, pair up with the same person who you were paired with for the listening activity. Together, come up with an empathetic response and a non-empathetic response for each of the statements, and if you have time, come up with your own statement and response.

¹ Note: This activity is adapted from *The Student EQ Edge Facilitation and Activity Guide* by Kanoy, Stein, & Book, 2013.

Bring the group back together and ask for sample empathetic and non-empathetic responses to each of the statements. Wrap up by asking students what they can take away from this activity for their everyday interactions with others.

Part 5: Wrap Up

To wrap up the session, ask participants to think about 2 takeaways from this session that they can implement today or this week. Pass out note cards (one for each participant) and ask them to write those two takeaways on the notecard. Then, either have everyone share what they wrote or ask for volunteers to share. If doing this virtually, you can have students write it down on a sheet of paper, in chat, or on a Jamboard.

If you'd like to end on a note of humor, you can play the *It's Not About the Nail* YouTube Video (1 minute, 40 seconds):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4EDhdAHRog>

Note: If you do show this video, you may want to acknowledge that this is playing off of gender stereotypes.