

5 tips for listening with empathy

Taking active steps to listen with an open mind and hear about what someone is going through shows that you care about them. This can help with those close to you as well as people in your life who come from different backgrounds. To listen empathetically means to go beyond words and understand the feelings behind them. When someone is upset, being available to listen and show compassion is the most helpful thing you can do.

Be nonjudgmental

Focus on having an open mind. If you begin to react to something, recognize what is happening and do your best to let it go. You are trying to be there for someone else whose experience is valid, even if it differs from yours. You do not need to agree with what someone says to show them you care.

Be attentive

Give the person your undivided attention. Remove distractions and do not look at your phone. Show your interest by leaning forward and making gestures such as nodding your head. Add occasional verbal comments such as, "right" or "uh huh." Keep an open posture by not crossing your arms. Do not interrupt, give advice, correct the person, shut down their feelings or do anything to stop them from speaking.

Be aware

Pay attention not only to the person's words, but also to tone of voice, body language and anything else that can help you understand their emotions. Try to put yourself in that person's shoes and get a deeper perspective on what they are going through.

Be comfortable with silence

Remember the saying, "Silence is golden." Do not try and fill the space, let the person go on at their own pace. They could be thinking about what to say next, trying to keep control of their emotions or it could be that they are coming to a realization as a result of talking to you.

Be there for the person now and later

When it is your turn to speak, paraphrase what you heard and do not suggest a solution. Ask open-ended questions to keep the conversation going and clarify comments if needed. Ask them about how they felt when something happened. Let them answer in their own time. When the conversation is over, see if they would like to sit down another time and make sure you get in touch with them afterwards.

For more information and resources, visit MagellanHealthcare.com/BIPOC-MH.

Sources:

- *7 Tips for Empathic Listening.* (n.d.). Retrieved July 31, 2020, from <https://www.crisisprevention.com/Blog/7-Tips-for-Empathic-Listening>
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