

DRAFT Facilitators'/trainers' directions

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An Empathy Circle – How to take part in an Empathy Circle.

Participants meet in person or on Zoom. Four is an ideal number, 3-7 is fine

Four basic roles rotate:

1. Speaker
2. Active listener, reflects the speaker's message (often called active listening)
3. Silent listeners - quietly observe and witness
4. Facilitator – organizes, hosts, and schedules the circle. Is timekeeper and helps process when needed. (Everyone is responsible for helping the process move forward.)

Facilitator welcomes participants, leads introductions: name, where from, something personal.

Reviews process. Announces topic and says speakers can talk about what is alive for them.

Announces time limits: 3-5 min. (multiple interactions)

Asks: **Who would like to start as the first speaker?** The facilitator is the first listener. (After that, the speaker selects the next active listener.)

As a speaker, you share a few sentences and pause to give the listener a chance to reflect what they heard.

As the active listener, you give full attention to the speaker. You tune into the speaker's words, tone of voice, and body language to get the **essence of the speaker's meaning**. Then **you recap the essence of the speaker's message in your own words***. You can summarize, paraphrase, or repeat the speaker's key words. You may also reflect what you sense the speaker is feeling. Resist your impulse to respond with YOUR ideas or questions because they block the speaker's continuing message.

Then as the speaker, you check to see if you feel understood to your satisfaction. If not, repeat your message. If you do feel understood, **continue sharing your message**, then pause so the listener can **reflect the essence** of your new message.

Continue the cycle until the speaker has nothing more to say or receives a signal from the timekeeper. Then finish what you are saying and get a final reflection. The speaker ends by saying something like, 'I feel fully heard.'

Then the roles rotate: the active listener becomes the speaker and selects the new active listener who reflects back what they are hearing and sensing. The others become silent listeners. They all continue taking turns for whatever time is allotted. Everyone gets more than one chance to listen and speak. (try for 3 turns for each person to speak and actively listen)

Continued...

Notes for the trainer and facilitator

Reflective listening: Listening communicates interest in and caring for the speaker's life experience. You become a supportive companion on the speaker's inner journey. Your whole focus is to listen to understand the speaker's inner experience and then to let the speaker know that he or she is being heard and understood.

First you become receptive, present. You accept the speaker exactly as they are. It requires holding your own judgments to fully grasp the speaker's point of view. You focus on the speaker's words, tone of voice, and body language to receive their meaning... what they are experiencing. Then you respond briefly with what you understand is the essence of the speaker's message. You are reflecting what they mean back to them. You are 'checking out' that both you and the speaker understand what he or she is trying to say. Typically, the speaker keeps right on talking, moving along the same road as their inner experience unfolds. If your reflection is not quite right, the speaker usually rephrases what they meant and continues speaking.

How to phrase your reflective listening response

Listening is following the speaker's thoughts and feelings and understanding what the other person is saying from their perspective. The reflections offered by the listener **don't interrupt** or derail the speaker.

A reflection makes a guess about what the speaker means. However, a good reflection is phrased not as a question but as a statement that conveys your understanding. This requires two specific changes in language.

1. First, you eliminate any front-end words that mark it as a question.
2. Second, you get rid of the question mark at the end. The difference is to lower your voice rather than raise it at the end of the sentence. Note the difference in spoken words between:

You are talented? and You are talented.

You're unhappy? and You're unhappy.

You're angry with your mother? And You're angry with your mother.

The reflections offered by the listener don't interrupt or derail the speaker. And the listener is not merely parroting what the speaker has said. The reflections move the conversation forward without jumping too far.

Empathic understanding:

Words can never do justice to a person's complex, ever-changing inner experience. Empathic listening communicates interest in and caring for the speaker's life experience.

Empathic listening is a learnable skill that leads to empathic understanding -- the cognitive and emotional ability to accurately perceive another person's inner world—their thoughts, feelings, and meanings—while maintaining a clear distinction between yourself and the other person. **You develop the ability to set aside personal distractions and emotional reactivity and listen deeply.** You are able to see the world through the speaker's eyes. You actually have a 'gut-deep' physical response to

the speaker's message that bypasses rational thought. It is driven by the autonomic nervous system and produces immediate bodily sensations such as a knot in your stomach, an upward flow in your chest, or tightness in your throat.

It happens automatically without conscious control or prior mental processing. The emotion manifests physically, often in the core or chest. These gut feelings are crucial signals that help process experiences, guide intuition, and store emotional memory. Experts often emphasize that paying attention to these bodily sensations is an important step in self-awareness and healing. You may even sense meanings that are not yet in the speaker's awareness. You are resonating with the speaker's experience.

Empathic listening instructions. Emotional resonance.

As a listener, you first recognize that the speaker is saying something important and **give the speaker full attention**. You set aside personal distractions and emotional reactivity to listen for the speaker's meaning.

You take in the speaker's words and body language and let the meaning form inside you. You actually 'feel with' someone; you kind of experience a shared emotional response – emotional resonance. This often involves a physical reaction, such as feeling a 'pit in my stomach' when the speaker is anxious or a 'heart-opening' when the speaker is inspired. **You then find words that fit the sense you got of the feeling meaning and say those to the speaker.**

The speaker then comments on whether your words are accurate or need correction. If inaccurate, the speaker usually corrects the meaning and continues speaking. If accurate, the speaker usually continues with their 'train of thought' as new experiences unfold inside them. They often become more alive, animated as their content and feelings unfold (in the presence of your empathic listening).

Repeating the speaker's words is NOT empathic listening because 'it hasn't 'gone through you'. **You actually feel the meaning inside yourself. Without it, you aren't fully there.**

The speaker's feeling heard and understood is a valuable experience for them. They can continue expressing themselves without interruption. They often become clearer about their inner experiences, feelings, and needs. Often they clarify what's important to them and solve their own problems.

Maya Angelou said...

'I've learned that people will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel.'

References: with details

Rogers

Miller

Gendlin

Rohlf's

