

EMPATHIC CONVERSATION STRUCTURE HANDOUT

A Structure for Empathic Speaking and Listening in Conversation

Below are my (John's) suggestions for a structure of empathic conversation. The structure gives you a chance to practice empathic communication skills, give and receive emotional support with challenges and difficulties, grow resilience, access new possibilities, ideas, insights and actions, and build empathic community. Bringing even light intentional structure to the conversation can create a container for dropping into a nourishing depth of enriching, supportive, and even healing empathic connection. I encourage you to use and modify my suggestions to co-create together what works best for you and your conversation partner.

1. **Reach out to someone** to ask if they would like to have an empathic conversation with you. It could be as short as 10-minutes — i.e. two 5-minute turns.
2. **As you begin together**, you could start with a very brief check in about how each of you are doing, e.g. 30 seconds each.
3. **Ask if they would like to take turns** speaking while the other listens.
4. **Before starting**, you could ask about doing a simple silent meditation together, e.g. putting attention on your breath for 30 seconds or longer, which you can time.
5. **Then, determine who will speak first.**
6. **Ask if they would like the turns to be timed or not.** If so, decide on how much time for each turn (e.g. 5 minutes each), and if one or both of you will keep time.
7. **The one speaking first begins when they're ready.** The listener listens silently, without interrupting. Both of you can practice bringing as much presence, warmth, acceptance and kind regard as you can to each other as you are listening and speaking, until the speaker has finished or time runs out. Both of you can consciously, intentionally practice whatever skills you have with empathy and mindfulness in conversation (see additional related handouts on www.johnkinyon.com/resources).
8. **The option of reflecting back:** Either the speaker or listener can ask about the listener saying back what they heard from the speaker. In this context, reflecting back means the listener saying back the essence of *what you heard the speaker say*, particularly what you heard was most important and meaningful *to the speaker*. It is not the listener talking about their own opinions or reactions to what the speaker said. I find reflecting back to be very valuable for both speaker *and* listener, and it's fine to not do this if either of you would prefer not to.
9. **Now, the one who was the listener becomes the speaker.** Repeat steps 7 and 8.
10. **To close your time together**, if you would like, share briefly any closing comments, debriefing, appreciation.

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