

Elements of Empathy

Elements of Empathic Speaking & Listening in Conversation, applied form of OFNR

Empathic Structure of Conversation. For me, empathic structure is slowing down the conversation, and with awareness focusing on one person at a time speaking while the other listens. In this way there is mindfulness of who is Speaker and who is Listener, and consciously switching roles as the conversation unfolds. This structure honors and supports two individual, subjective realities coming together to share experience with each other, understanding differences and finding underlying commonality. A helpful image for me is *two empty picture frames*, one in front of each person's face. Empathic conversation is to try to look from the other's perspective, through their subjective frame, without losing our own frame, and to invite the other to do the same.

- **Presence (non-thinking attention)**

This first element of empathy is about resting your attention on the other person while you are speaking and listening. It is awareness focused toward the other, letting go thinking or "efforting." As Listener, it is paying attention to the speaker's voice qualities (e.g. pacing, rhythm, tone, volume, spaces between the words), and visually taking in their nonverbal body language (e.g. eyes, face, movements). As Speaker, it is letting your words flow from awareness and presence with the Listener.

- **Understanding (holding multiple perspectives/subjective frames)**

This element is about hearing and being heard about our thoughts, feelings, and wants, separate from agreement or disagreement. As the Listener, it is trying to understand the other's experience and perspective from their world, their truth and reality. At times in the conversation you may reflect back to the Speaker what you're hearing, perhaps using some of their key words or making guesses and paraphrasing in your own words. It is acknowledging how they see things, how they feel, and what they want, without losing your own reality/perspective of what is true for you. When you are Speaker, it is expressing your truth in a way that is about being heard and understood for your experience rather than trying to get agreement.

- **Needs (and meeting needs)**

This element is about getting to the universal human needs behind thoughts, feelings, and wants; and looking for what would meet those needs. It is listening or speaking with the focus on, "What is important to each of us that's vital and essential to all humans and all life?" It is deepening into needs, and also seeing what strategies and requests emerge to meet them. As Listener, you may at times reflect back to the Speaker the needs you're hearing or guessing, and connecting needs with feelings.

- **[The 4 Communication Choices]**

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