**Active Empathetic Listening**

Think of a current problem you are facing. This could be a conflict with a friend or family member, difficult course you are taking, a goal you are having difficulty achieving, etc.

Working with a peer, have an active empathetic discussion. One person should share their current problem (at a degree they are comfortable sharing). The other person should engage in active empathetic listening using the techniques outlined below. Once completed, reverse roles.

1. **Paraphrase:**

Once the other person has finished expressing a thought, paraphrase what he or she said to make sure you understand and to show that you are paying attention. Helpful ways to paraphrase include “What I hear you saying is …,” “It sounds like …,” and “If I understand you right ….”

1. **Ask questions:**

When appropriate, ask questions to encourage the other person to elaborate on his or her thoughts and feelings. Avoid jumping to conclusions about what the other person means. Instead, ask questions to clarify his or her meaning, such as, “When you say\_\_\_\_\_, do you mean\_\_\_\_\_”?

1. **Express empathy:**

If the other person voices negative feelings, strive to validate these feelings rather than questioning or defending against them. For example, if the speaker expresses frustration, try to consider why he or she feels that way, regardless of whether you think that feeling is justified or whether you would feel that way yourself were you in his or her position. You might respond, “I can sense that you’re feeling frustrated,” and even “I can understand how that situation could cause frustration.”

1. **Use engaged body language:**

Show that you are engaged and interested by making eye contact, nodding, facing the other person, and maintaining an open and relaxed body posture. Avoid attending to distractions in your environment or checking your phone. Be mindful of your facial expressions: Avoid expressions that might communicate disapproval or disgust.

1. **Avoid judgment:**

Your goal is to understand the other person’s perspective and accept it for what it is, even if you disagree with it. Try not to interrupt with counter-arguments or mentally prepare a rebuttal while the other person is speaking.

1. **Avoid giving advice:**

Problem-solving is likely to be more effective after both conversation partners understand one another’s perspective and feel heard. Moving too quickly into advice-giving can be counterproductive.

1. **Take turns:**

After the other person has had a chance to speak and you have engaged in the active listening steps above, ask if it’s okay for you to share your perspective. When sharing your perspective, express yourself as clearly as possible using “I” statements (e.g., “I feel overwhelmed when you don’t help out around the house”). It may also be helpful, when relevant, to express empathy for the other person’s perspective (e.g., “I know you’ve been very busy lately and don’t mean to leave me hanging …”).

Adapted from *Greater Good Science Center (2019). Active Listening. Retrieved from* [*https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/active\_listening*](https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/active_listening)