



# EMPATHIC LISTENING WITH FAMILIES

Empathic listening is all about tuning in to understand how someone else is feeling, what they're thinking and where they're coming from. Demonstrating empathic listening means acknowledging and validating the other person's emotions and experiences as they share them. Empathic listening is important when building partnerships with families, as it helps them to feel heard and understood - an essential foundation for creating a trusting relationship!

To practice empathic listening, center the family member **by using "you" and/or "your"** in your response, reflecting their emotion or experience back to them.

This helps create a sense of connection and shows the family member that you understand them, making them feel valued and respected.

Family member shares something sensitive with you

Listen for the emotion or experience being conveyed

Validate the emotion or experience by paraphrasing it back

Give the family member time to share more before moving on





Notice how the educator **acknowledges the emotion** behind the family member's words by validating how the family member is feeling about the situation ("frustrating for you"; "difficult to deal with").

**FAMILY:** I keep getting calls about my child's behavior, and I'm struggling with the same issues at home. I don't have all the answers, and it's exhausting to receive these phone calls so often.

**EDUCATOR:** This must be frustrating for you - especially when you're experiencing the same challenges at home. It's difficult to deal with repeated concerns without feeling like there are solutions in sight.



Notice how the educator **validates the impact** between the family's efforts and the child's growth ("the effort you've been putting in"; "thriving with your support").

**FAMILY:** We've been working hard at home to create a positive routine, and it's amazing to see how much my child is growing. They've been showing a lot of responsibility and confidence, and I'm really proud of their progress.

**EDUCATOR:** That's wonderful to hear! It sounds like all the effort you've put into creating a positive environment is really paying off. I see the growth too - it's clear they're really thriving with your support.



Notice how the educator not only acknowledges the family member's emotions, but also **mirrors their concern** for their child ("hard for you to see your child feeling isolated"; "all you want is to see them connect with others").

**FAMILY:** My child has always had trouble making friends, and lately, I've noticed they seem even more withdrawn. It's breaking my heart to see them struggle socially.

**EDUCATOR:** It's incredibly hard for you to see your child feeling isolated, especially when it's been an ongoing challenge. You care deeply about their well-being, and it's understandable you're feeling heartbroken when all you want is to see them connect with others.

“My child made the honor roll for the first time!”

“You must be so proud!”

“I love this community but feel like my child may do better at another school.”

“That’s a tough decision for you to navigate as a parent.”

“I don’t know how to manage everything on my plate.”

“It sounds like you’re feeling overwhelmed.”



Remember  
this



Empathic listening is about centering *you* - the other person - in your response and showing you understand *their* emotions and experience. It’s not just about hearing their words, but acknowledging *their* feelings and perspectives in a way that makes them feel supported. Empathic listening goes beyond just hearing words - it’s about connecting with the feelings behind those words.

Keep in mind that an empathic response is just a start. Simply acknowledging someone’s emotions does not necessarily resolve their concerns or challenges. **After acknowledging emotions and demonstrating empathy, it’s important to move towards solutions, working together to address the issue at hand.** Empathy creates a supportive foundation, but action and problem-solving are necessary to create lasting change and progress.

