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Ageing Well

WP3/ A1 - Activity 2

Module D: Effective Ways to Communicate with the
Elders

HAPPSY

Lesson Plan 4: Empathy and Active Listening





Lesson Plan 4: Empathy and Active Listening

Objective:

This lesson plan focuses on enhancing participants' communication skills through experiential activities designed to foster empathy and active listening. The aims and objectives center on improving participants' ability to understand and connect with others by practicing empathy and giving full attention during conversations. The first activity provides hands-on practice in listening attentively and responding empathetically, helping participants accurately interpret and reflect on the communicated feelings and content of others. The second activity involves creating actionable plans to apply empathy and active listening in various daily interactions, identifying common scenarios where these skills are essential. The final role-play activity offers participants a controlled environment to practice and refine their empathy and active listening skills in simulated interpersonal situations, enhancing their emotional intelligence and ability to respond effectively to others' emotional states. These objectives collectively aim to deepen interpersonal relationships and enhance both personal and professional communication.

Duration: 60 minutes in total (including all activities)

Activities:

- Paired Activity – Practice Empathy and Active Listening Exercises (20 minutes)
- Small Group Activity – Plan Development – Develop a Plan to Incorporate Empathy and Active Listening in Daily Life (20 minutes)
- Role Play – Practicing Empathy and Active Listening (20 minutes)



Materials needed:

Activity 1

- Handouts with guidelines and tips for practicing empathy and active listening (optional).

Activity 2

- Whiteboards or flip charts and markers for each group.
- Handouts with reminders about the key principles of empathy and active listening (optional).

Activity 3

- Scenario sheets that outline different interpersonal situations (e.g., a friend in distress, a coworker with a problem, a family member sharing personal news).
- A space suitable for pairs or small groups to perform role-play without disturbances.

Learning outcomes:

- Participants will develop the ability to sense and understand the feelings and perspectives of others, improving their emotional intelligence and fostering deeper connections.
- Participants will acquire the skill of giving full attention to speakers, understanding the content and emotions behind the communication, which is crucial for effective responses and interactions.



- By the end of the sessions, participants will be able to communicate more effectively in personal and professional settings, ensuring their interactions are more thoughtful and considerate.
- Participants will learn to identify specific scenarios in their daily lives where empathy and active listening are beneficial and will have actionable strategies to apply these skills.
- Through improved empathy and active listening, participants will be better equipped to resolve conflicts constructively, reducing misunderstandings and promoting a more collaborative atmosphere.
- Participants will develop personalized plans to incorporate empathy and active listening into their daily routines, ensuring ongoing development and application of these skills.

List of sources and references related to the activity (APA style):

A Call To Order (2023, October 18). Empathy in Action: Best Practices for Listening and Understanding Senior Voice. Seniors Blue Book. Resources for Aging Well.

<https://seniorsbluebook.com/articles/empathy-in-action-best-practices-for-listening-and-understanding-senior-voices>

Cherry, K. (2024, February 19). How Empathic Listening Can Build Deeper Connections in Your Life. How to put down the distractions and really listen. Verywellmind.

<https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-try-empathic-listening-8357721>



Crisis Prevention Institute (2024, September 5). 7 Tips for Empathic Listening in Social Services.

<https://www.crisisprevention.com/blog/human-services/7-tips-for-empathic-listening-in-social-services/>

Jack, K. (2022). Demonstrating empathy when communicating with older people. *Nursing Older People*, 34(1).

Newlife, L. (2023, November 10). Listening with the Heart: The Role of Empathy in Managing Senior Care. *New LifeStyles. Guide to Senior Living & Care*.

<https://www.newlifestyles.com/blog/listening-with-the-heart-the-role-of-empathy-in-managing-senior-care>

RSA (2013, December 10). Brené Brown on Empathy [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>

Sutton, J. (2016, July 21). Active Listening: The Art of Empathetic Conversation.

PositivePsychology.com. <https://positivepsychology.com/active-listening/>



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Activity 1: Practice Empathy and Active Listening Exercises

Pair and Group Activity



ACTIVITY 1

Title of the activity: Practice Empathy and Active Listening Exercises

Short description of the theoretical context of the activity:

Empathy and active listening are cornerstone skills in effective communication, enabling individuals to understand and connect with others on a deeper level. Empathy involves sensing others' feelings and perspectives, while active listening requires full attention to the speaker, fostering a greater understanding and response. These skills are particularly important in any setting where trust and understanding are pivotal, such as healthcare, education, and management.

Aims and objectives of the activity:

- To enhance participants' ability to practice empathy and active listening in their interactions.
- To provide hands-on practice in listening attentively and responding empathetically.
- To develop participants' skills in accurately interpreting and reflecting feelings and content communicated by others.
- To improve interpersonal communication and deepen relationships through effective listening and empathetic engagement.

Materials Needed:

- Handouts with guidelines and tips for practicing empathy and active listening (optional).



Duration of the activity: 20 minutes

Description of the process of the activity:

Step 1: Explain the importance of empathy and active listening, highlighting how these skills enhance interpersonal relationships and communication efficiency. Briefly discuss the key aspects of both skills.

Step 2: Divide participants into pairs. Each pair engages in a two-part exercise:

- Part 1: Speaker and Listener - One person shares a recent experience or ongoing challenge while the other practices active listening. The listener should focus entirely on the speaker, avoiding interruptions, and making eye contact. After 3 minutes, the listener summarizes what they heard, focusing on the speaker's feelings and content.
- Part 2: Switch Roles - Participants switch roles, and the exercise is repeated, allowing the former speaker to practice listening and summarizing.

Step 3: After the exercises, reconvene as a whole group. Ask participants to share their experiences, what they learned about their listening skills, and how it felt to be listened to empathetically.

Step 4: Facilitate a brief reflection session where participants consider how they can apply these skills in their daily personal and professional interactions. Offer tips for further practice, such as being mindful of body language, maintaining eye contact, and using affirmations like nodding or verbal acknowledgments to show attentiveness.



Debrief Questions:

- For the speaker: How did it feel to have someone simply listen without giving advice?
- For the listener: What was challenging about summarizing the speaker's feelings? How did you try to put yourself in their shoes?

Tips and recommendations:

- Emphasize the importance of a non-judgmental, supportive attitude during the exercises to encourage openness and honesty.
- Ensure each participant has an equal opportunity to speak and listen by strictly adhering to time limits.
- Encourage participants to give constructive feedback to each other on their listening and summarizing skills, focusing on what was done well and what could be improved.

List of sources and references related to the activity (APA style):

A Call To Order (2023, October 18). Empathy in Action: Best Practices for Listening and Understanding Senior Voice. Seniors Blue Book. Resources for Aging Well.

<https://seniorsbluebook.com/articles/empathy-in-action-best-practices-for-listening-and-understanding-senior-voices>

Crisis Prevention Institute (2024, September 5). 7 Tips for Empathic Listening in Social Services.



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<https://www.crisisprevention.com/blog/human-services/7-tips-for-empathic-listening-in-social-services/>

RSA (2013, December 10). Brené Brown on Empathy [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>



Handout with guidelines and tips for practicing empathy and active listening

Practicing empathy and active listening are crucial skills that enhance communication and strengthen relationships. Here are some guidelines and tips for developing these skills:

Empathy

- **Understand the Perspective of Others:** Try to see the world from the other person's point of view. Recognize their feelings and experiences without judgment, which helps in understanding their emotions and reactions better.
- **Be Curious:** Ask questions to learn more about what the other person is experiencing. Use open-ended questions that encourage them to express themselves more fully.
- **Validate Emotions:** Acknowledge the other person's feelings, even if you don't agree with their perspective. Validation can be as simple as saying, "It sounds like you're really stressed about this."
- **Reflect Feelings:** Show you are listening and understanding by reflecting back what you hear in terms of emotions and content. For instance, "It seems like you felt left out when they didn't invite you."
- **Offer Support:** Ask how you can help or what the person needs. Sometimes, just being there and listening is all that's necessary.



Active Listening

- **Give Full Attention:** When listening, focus completely on the speaker. Avoid distractions like phones or other tasks. Body language, such as eye contact, nodding, and facing the speaker, also shows attentiveness.
- **Avoid Interrupting:** Let the speaker finish their thoughts without interrupting. Interruptions can make the speaker feel unheard and can disrupt the flow of conversation.
- **Reflect and Clarify:** Repeat back what you've heard in your own words to confirm understanding. Clarify by asking questions if parts of the message are unclear.
- **Respond Appropriately:** Active listening is about building a conversation, not a debate. Respond in a way that acknowledges the speaker's feelings and contributions.
- **Keep an Open Mind:** Enter conversations without preconceived notions or judgments. Being open helps you absorb the full meaning of what is being communicated.



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Lesson Plan 4: Empathy and Active Listening

Activity 2: Developing a Plan to Incorporate Empathy and
Active Listening in Daily Life

Small Group Activity



ACTIVITY 2

Title of the activity: Small Group Activity – Developing a Plan to Incorporate Empathy and Active Listening in Daily Life

Short description of the theoretical context of the activity:

Empathy and active listening are crucial skills for effective communication, promoting understanding and connection between individuals. These skills are particularly valuable across various daily contexts, including the workplace, family interactions, and friendships. They help in resolving conflicts, building trust, and enhancing collaborative efforts. Planning to incorporate these skills involves identifying specific situations where they can be applied and outlining practical steps to enhance their use.

Aims and objectives of the activity:

- To create actionable plans that integrate empathy and active listening into daily interactions across different life contexts.
- To identify common scenarios in daily life where empathy and active listening are needed.
- To formulate specific, actionable strategies to enhance these skills.
- To promote continuous personal and professional development through improved communication.

Materials Needed:

- Whiteboards or flip charts and markers for each group.



- Handouts with reminders about the key principles of empathy and active listening (optional).

Duration of the activity: 20 minutes

Description of the process of the activity:

Step 1: Brief participants on the importance of empathy and active listening in fostering effective communication and deeper relationships. Explain the activity's objectives and outcomes.

Step 2: Divide participants into small groups. Assign each group to think of situations in different contexts (e.g., at work, home, or with friends) where empathy and active listening could significantly improve communication outcomes.

Step 3: Each group develops a plan that includes at least three practical strategies to enhance empathy and active listening skills. Examples of strategies might include:

- In the workplace: Setting aside regular times for team members to express concerns or ideas, ensuring that each person is heard without interruption.
- In the family: Implementing family meetings where each member can share their feelings about specific issues, practicing reflective listening to validate each other's emotions.
- In friendships: Establishing habits of checking in on each other's emotional well-being and practicing being fully present during conversations.



Step 4: Allow each group to present their plan to the class. Encourage other groups to provide constructive feedback and additional ideas that could enhance the plan.

Tips and recommendations:

- Encourage participants to be more specific. The more specific the strategies and scenarios, the easier it will be for participants to apply them in real life.
- Encourage creative and innovative approaches to integrating empathy and active listening into daily routines.
- Stress the importance of regular practice and reflection to truly enhance these skills.

List of sources and references related to the activity (APA style):

Cherry, K. (2024, February 19). How Empathic Listening Can Build Deeper Connections in Your Life. How to put down the distractions and really listen. Verywellmind.

<https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-try-empathic-listening-8357721>

Jack, K. (2022). Demonstrating empathy when communicating with older people. Nursing Older People, 34(1).

Newlife, L. (2023, November 10). Listening with the Heart: The Role of Empathy in Managing Senior Care. New LifeStyles. Guide to Senior Living & Care.

<https://www.newlifestyles.com/blog/listening-with-the-heart-the-role-of-empathy-in-managing-senior-care>



Handout with reminders about the key principles of empathy and active listening

Key Principles of Empathy

- Understanding: Strive to grasp the feelings and emotions of the other person by putting yourself in their shoes. This means appreciating their perspective and experiences as if they were your own.
- Non-judgment: Approach the feelings and experiences of others without judgment or evaluation. Accept their emotions as valid in their context.
- Communication: Express your understanding of the other person's feelings and needs. This could involve verbal affirmations that you recognize and respect their emotions.
- Emotional Resonance: This involves not just understanding or sympathizing, but actually connecting with the emotions of the other person on a deeper level, sharing in their feelings.

Key Principles of Active Listening

- Full Attention: Focus entirely on the speaker, setting aside distractions and preparing to listen. This involves both mental focus and appropriate body language such as eye contact and nodding.
- Hold Back Response: Instead of formulating a response or interrupting while the other person is speaking, hold your thoughts and allow them the space to express themselves fully.



- Reflective Listening: Mirror the speaker's message by paraphrasing or summarizing what they've said, which shows that you are listening and understanding their message.
- Clarification: Seek to clarify any points that are unclear without assuming or guessing what the speaker might mean. Ask questions that encourage deeper explanation.
- Encouragement: Use verbal and non-verbal cues to encourage the speaker to continue, showing that you are interested and engaged. This can include prompts like "uh-huh" and open gestures.



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Activity 3: Practicing Empathy and Active Listening -Role Play

Pair or Small Group Activity



ACTIVITY 3

Title of the activity: Role Play – Practicing Empathy and Active Listening

Short description of the theoretical context of the activity:

Role-playing exercises provide a safe and controlled environment for individuals to practice and refine their communication skills, including empathy and active listening. These exercises allow participants to explore different interpersonal scenarios, helping them develop the ability to understand and respond to the emotions and thoughts of others effectively. Such activities are especially beneficial for improving emotional intelligence and enhancing interpersonal relationships in both personal and professional settings.

Aims and objectives of the activity:

- To provide participants with hands-on practice in demonstrating empathy and active listening within various interpersonal situations.
- To simulate real-life situations where empathy and active listening can be applied.
- To enhance participants' skills in understanding and responding to others' emotional states.
- To receive and provide feedback on the use of empathy and active listening in a role-play setting.

Materials Needed:



- Scenario sheets that outline different interpersonal situations (e.g., a friend in distress, a coworker with a problem, a family member sharing personal news).
- A space suitable for pairs or small groups to perform role-play without disturbances.

Duration of the activity: 20 minutes

Description of the process of the activity:

Step 1: Briefly explain the purpose of the role-play exercise, focusing on the importance of empathy and active listening in effective communication. Outline what these skills entail and why they are crucial for interpersonal relationships.

Step 2: Hand out different scenario sheets to pairs or small groups, ensuring that each pair/group gets a unique situation to role-play.

Step 3: Each pair/group takes turns acting out their assigned scenarios. One participant acts as the person exhibiting a problem or emotional state, while the other practices empathy and active listening. Encourage participants to fully engage with their roles, attempting to genuinely understand and respond to their partner's situation.

Step 4: After each role-play, participants provide feedback to each other on the effectiveness of the communication. Discuss what was done well and what could be improved. Highlight specific instances where empathy and active listening were either successfully implemented or could be enhanced.



Tips and recommendations:

- Instruct participants to act out their roles as realistically as possible to simulate genuine emotional responses and challenges.
- Allow participants to switch roles within their pairs/groups to experience both sides of the interaction, enhancing their understanding and empathy.
- Encourage participants to relate the role-play scenarios to their own life experiences, discussing how they would apply the skills practiced in similar real-life situations.

List of sources and references related to the activity (APA style):

Cherry, K. (2024, February 19). How Empathic Listening Can Build Deeper Connections in Your Life. How to put down the distractions and really listen. Verywellmind.

<https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-try-empathic-listening-8357721>

RSA (2013, December 10). Brené Brown on Empathy [Video]. YouTube.

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Sutton, J. (2016, July 21). Active Listening: The Art of Empathetic Conversation.

PositivePsychology.com. <https://positivepsychology.com/active-listening/>



Role-Play scenarios involving empathy and active listening

Scenario 1: Friend in Distress

Situation:

Your close friend has recently been going through a tough time. They've been feeling down but haven't been talking much about it. Today, they tell you, "I just don't think things will ever get better."

Instructions:

As the listener, show empathy and understanding toward your friend's feelings.

Focus on active listening without trying to "fix" their problem.

Scenario 2: Partner Feels Unappreciated

Situation:

Your partner says, "I feel like I'm always doing things around the house, and no one notices or appreciates it. It's exhausting."

Instructions:

As the listener, practice empathy by acknowledging their feelings of being unappreciated.

Use active listening techniques such as paraphrasing their feelings to show understanding.

Scenario 3: Friend Facing Financial Problems

Situation:

Your friend says, "I'm really struggling to make ends meet. I'm embarrassed to admit it, but I've fallen behind on bills, and I don't know how to dig myself out of this."

Instructions:

As the listener, practice empathy by acknowledging their fear and shame around financial struggles.

Avoid making light of the situation or offering unsolicited financial advice.