

Deflective Listening: Common Responses

Here are some common forms of communication that block empathy by taking the focus away from the person who is speaking:

1. **Giving Advice / Fixing:** Telling the other person what you think they should do.
"You should leave your job and find somewhere else to work where you'll be appreciated."
2. **Analyzing / Diagnosing:** Interpreting or evaluating a person's behavior.
"I think you are taking this out on your wife when -- in reality -- you are angry with your mother about things that happened in your childhood."
3. **Storytelling:** Grabbing the focus away from another person and it back to your own experience.
"I know just how you feel! This reminds me of a time that I..."
4. **Pity / Sympathy:** Feeling sorry for someone, or sharing your own feelings about what they said.
"Oh, you poor thing... I feel so sad for you."
5. **Reassuring / Consoling:** Trying to make someone feel better.
"You might be upset now, but I'm sure you'll feel better soon."
6. **Shutting Down:** Discounting a person's feelings and trying to shift them in another direction.
"Quit feeling sorry for yourself!" or, "There is no reason to feel that way!"
7. **Changing the Subject:** Avoiding an uncomfortable moment that you don't know how to deal with, and changing the course of the conversation.
"Uhh... yeah... Do you think Michigan's football team will make the Rose Bowl this season?"
8. **Interrogating:** Using directed questions to expose a person's behavior or to provoke guilt.
"When did this begin?" or, "Why did you do that?" or, "What got into you?"
9. **Commiserating:** Agreeing with the speaker's judgments of others.
"I know what you mean -- your boss is one of the biggest jerks I have ever met!"
10. **One-upping:** Convincing the speaker that whatever they went through, you had it worse.
"You think that's bad? Let me tell you what happened to me when I was in that situation!"

