

EMPATHIC COMMUNICATION 1.0

DO LESS OF

ADVICE AND REASSURANCE:

Although both usually come from a place of caring, both can also convey that we don't want to hear anymore from the other person; that we instead want to "fix" their feelings, tell them what to do, and be done with it.



DO MORE OF

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS:

Open ended questions encouraging the other person to share their thoughts and feelings. Closed questions tend to shut the conversation down.



DO LESS OF

CHEERLEADING:

Cheerleading ("that is great!" or "how awesome!") is well-meaning, and most of us are in the habit of using it quite a bit. Cheerleading, however, doesn't invite others to share with us how they feel about their accomplishments or events, instead it prioritizes our own value judgment. When we do feel the desire to give positive feedback, we can provide others with specific praise, such as "I'm so impressed by the effort and time you put into coming to appointments."



DO MORE OF

EMPATHIC BODY LANGUAGE:

Consciously using our body language and voice tone to convey empathy is very powerful. We usually look to other's tone and body language more than the words someone says to evaluate genuineness.



DO LESS OF

FIXING:

Acknowledge the other person's feelings before trying to 'fix' anything. This creates a positive bond, and often if we do this well, we don't need to "fix" anything. Sometimes this is referred to as 'connection before content'



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DO MORE OF

FOCUS ON STRENGTHS:

Focusing on strengths before addressing the difficulty that has been shared is a very impactful way of showing empathy and goodwill. It also often frees us from our internal urgency to 'fix', as we remind ourselves the person in front of us has many resources and strengths.



DO LESS OF

USING CONTROL WORDS:

Control words like "should", "must", "have to", "need to" indicate a power differential. As human beings, we have a natural tendency to protect our autonomy, and when we hear words that tell us what we 'must' do, we tend to resist and push back.



DO MORE OF

EMPATHIC REFLECTING:

This is reflective listening, sharing back what we hear. It helps the other person to know that their thoughts and feelings are important to us and that we are truly hearing them.



DO LESS OF

USING 'BUT':

Qualifying responses with a "but" often signifies a shift from an empathetic response to judgment or advice-giving. For example, resist "You've done so well on getting a sponsor, but now you need to work on the smoking."



DO MORE OF

PRACTICE, REPAIR AND PRACTICE AGAIN!

Enhancing empathetic communication is a lifetime practice for most of us. The practice itself is enriching for our clients, our family, friends and even how we talk to ourselves.

