

## Empathy

### Definitions (Caselman, 2010):

- The ability to “put yourself in someone else’s shoes
- The ability to understand others feelings even though your feelings are different
- The ability to be sensitive to others’ feelings
- The ability to experience other people’s feelings
- The ability to show caring behaviors towards others
- Feeling and understanding how it is for another person.
- Clinical definition: Rogers: “[Empathy is] an accurate, empathic understanding of the client’s world as seen from the inside. To sense the client’s private world as if it were your own, but without losing the ‘as if’ quality—this is empathy.”

### Types of empathy (Wikipedia, retrieved 7/22/2013):

- **Cognitive empathy** drive to identify another’s mental states
- **Emotional empathy** drive to respond with an appropriate emotion to another’s mental state
  - **Personal distress** the inclination to experience self-centered feelings of discomfort and anxiety in response to another’s suffering
  - **Empathic concern** the inclination to experience sympathy and compassion towards others in response to their suffering

### Blocks to Empathic (Therapeutic) Listening (Essentials of Emotional Communication for Reaching the Unreachable Student: Where Do I Start? What Do I Say? How Do I Do It?; Reyes, 2013)

1. Drifting in concentration, paying attention to other things, ideas, or people.
2. Filtering or listening selectively; that is, we listen only to what supports and reinforces our belief system
3. Taking charge of the topic, ignoring what the child says
4. Shifting or changing the topic when we do not feel comfortable with the message
5. Correcting the child
6. Explaining it away or interpreting the message for the student (as opposed as with the student).
7. Jumping to conclusions to fill in any missing pieces in the message based on conclusions rooted on our past experiences with the child
8. Prejudging the child based on little or ambiguous information; we infer a lot and make a quick evaluation. Our evaluation then influences how we listen and how we respond to the message.
9. Evaluating and or judging the message based on who is speaking rather than on what is said
10. Blaming and/or finding fault in the child.
11. Antagonizing with the child, for example, “I don’t care if Sammy was pushing in line too; do you always follow what Sammy does?”
12. Searching for the weak point in the message, so that we can prove that we are right and the child is wrong. Our focus here is in us being right, and we will walk a great length to avoid losing the argument or to avoid being wrong.
13. Being too quick to disagree with the child. If we listen mainly to find something to

disagree with and then defend and maintain our own position regardless of what the child says, we are sparring. This listening block keeps us busy arguing and debating with the child, one of the fastest routes to a power struggle. We never hear what the student says because we are too focused on finding things to disagree with him.

14. Defending either our own position, or someone else's position.
15. Giving our own opinion and point of view, in particular, when we convey the message that our own opinions and points of view are more important than the child's are.
16. Using the child's actions (behavior) to state what we want (as opposed to what the child wants or needs).
17. Minimizing or discounting the child's feelings.
18. Denying the child's feelings
19. Reading the child's mind, guessing a hidden meaning, or guessing a hidden motivation
20. Leading or directing the child to talk only about the things that we want to talk about
21. Pondering in something that already happened or in something the child said (focusing in the past) at the expense of listening to what the child is saying in the present (focusing in the present
22. Keeping our focus in how to manage what is going to happen next (focusing in the future) rather than in listening to what the child is currently saying, or listening in the present
23. Rehearsing, or mentally planning our response while the student is still talking.
24. Trying to fix things. A similar listening block would be rescuing or taking responsibility in solving the problem for the child
25. Giving advice that tells the child what to do next.
26. Lecturing and educating the child
27. "Stealing" the story by giving ourselves the role of the main character and making the story all about us, most specifically, what we want or need. Because we are such an interesting character our attention is on crafting the main character ("wonderful me"); that is, our focus is on telling about us, not on learning about the child.
28. Identifying with the story (another way in which "wonderful me" can steal the story). Whatever we hear the child saying triggers our memories of our own similar experiences and endlessly, we start sharing our "it happened to me too" experiences before the child had the chance to finish her story
29. Feeling sorry for the child; also known as pitying
30. Consoling and/or making excuses for the child
31. Asking the child, "Why do you always do that?" Chances are that the child is not going to be able to explain his behavior.