

Fostering Connections Through Active Listening and Empathy

Fostering connections with others can help us feel seen, heard, and understood. Think of the last time you felt connected to someone. What did they do or say to help you feel that way?

Here are some skills you can practice to help you foster connections with others.



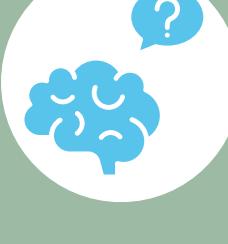
Listening Is Enough

Sometimes, people just want someone to listen to them. If someone is sharing something difficult, we might be tempted to “fix” them or “make them feel better”, but that isn’t necessary.



Avoiding Judgement

We tend to feel disconnected rather than connected when we feel we are being judged. Rather than rushing to conclusions about someone or their story, try listening with open curiosity, like a researcher aiming to understand rather than evaluate.



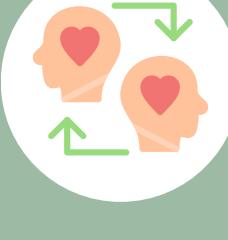
Asking Open-Ended Questions

Asking questions is a great way to help someone feel you are interested in hearing and understanding their story. Use phrases like, “Tell me more about ...,” or, “How did make you feel?” to express your interest.



Using Positive Body and Verbal Cues

We can show someone we are interested and engaged in what they are saying without even using words. Use positive body cues, like facing the speaker, nodding your head, or verbal cues like, “mhmm,” “yeah,” “okay,” to show interest and curiosity.



Empathizing With Feelings

“Empathy fuels connection” ~ Dr. Brene Brown. Empathy is recognizing what someone is feeling and then communicating that to them. Use phrases like, “Are you feeling ... because of ...?” to express empathy.



Cultural Context

Fostering connections can look different across cultures. For example, direct eye contact or facing someone may feel respectful in one culture and inappropriate in another, depending on the age, gender, or relationship you have with the person. Adapt these skills in ways that feel most comfortable for you **and** the other person.