

10 Barriers to Effective Listening (a.k.a. “Empathy Blockers”)

Some common forms of communication that block empathy and take the focus away from the speaker:

1. **Giving Advice / Fixing:** Telling the other person what you think they should do.

“I think you should leave your husband and find somebody more caring to be with.”

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:** Moving the focus away from the other and back to your own experience.

“I know just how you feel! This reminds me of a time that I...”

4. **Sympathy:** Feeling sorry for the other, 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 the person “feel better” by telling them things will improve.
“You might be upset now, but I’m sure you will 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. **Correcting:** Giving the person *your* opinion or belief about a situation.
“Wait a minute – I never said that!” or, “That’s not the way it happened!”

8. **Interrogating:** Using directed questions to ‘expose’ or change a person’s behavior.
“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.