

Wellbeing: Developing Listening Skills and Understanding Empathy

Overview and Purpose

This lesson explores how pupils can develop their listening, understanding and empathy skills to build strong relationships and support each other. This session requires access to Youtube.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Understand how we can develop our listening skills
- Develop an understanding of empathy

Vocabulary

- **Empathy** - the ability to sense other people's emotions and imagine what they might be feeling
- **Sympathy** - the feeling of pity for someone else or someone else's situation
- **Wellbeing** - the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy

Preparation / Materials Needed

- Chart Paper / Post It Notes
- Marker pens
- Download the session PowerPoint
- Brene Brown on Empathy (<https://youtu.be/1Evwgu369Jw>).

For virtual delivery, students can make their own notes (on paper or on a device) and can download their own copy of the activities pack.

Agenda

Understanding empathy (5 min)

Understanding empathy (Youtube video)

Developing listening skills (10 mins)

- How well do we take notice and listen

Wrap-up & Reflection (5 mins)

- Reflection on the session and its learning objectives

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Getting Started / Warm Up (5 mins)

Show the video from Brene Brown on Empathy (<https://youtu.be/1Evwgu369Jw>). Open into a quick discussion:

- Has anyone experience of listening to/being listened to either with or without empathy?
- Who has had an “at least” said to them in the last week?

Main Activity (10 mins)

Show **heading only** on slide 3: “How well do you take notice and listen?” (you will need to click to reveal the rest of the slide when needed)

Divide the class into two and partner off: one half will be listeners the other half talkers. Take listeners to one side and give them a brief to **ACT DISTRACTED** and **DISINTERESTED**. Two groups get together and have a conversation. How did it feel?

Repeat the exercise but with the emphasis on listening well. How does it feel to be listened to properly?

Being a better listener can be a skill that you can develop. The Samaritans are an example of great listeners. The rest of the slide (click to reveal) shows us their listening wheel, widely shared by them.

- **Open questions** “How, what?”
- A **summary** helps to show the individual that you have listened & understood the circumstances & the feelings
- **Repeating** back a word or phrase encourages the individual to go on and expand “it all seems too much?” Sometimes an individual may gloss over an important point. By exploring these areas further we can help them clarify these points for themselves “When you say... do you mean...?”
- Short words of **encouragement** “Yes, go on, hmm.” The individual is often looking for empathy and understanding. We need to show that we have understood the situation by reacting to it, “I can’t imagine how difficult that must be.”

Summary / Wrap Up (5 mins)

Show slide 4. It is really **important** to emphasise that **we are not training students to become counsellors** but that we can all be better listeners. Encourage pupils to make note of support that is available: School counsellor, GP, family, online support such as Mind or the Samaritans.

VERY IMPORTANT: students must know **not to keep anything confidential** that puts anyone’s safety at risk.

When having a conversation with a friend how much listening time do you actually spend thinking about what you are going to say next?

The “Reverse Curriculum”

This table gives you as facilitator some background on how listening as a skill is under-developed in the curriculum.

	% of time spent communicating this way (Wilt 1950)	Number of years learning this skill in school (Burley-Allen 1982)
Listening	45	0-0.5
Speaking	30	1-2
Reading	16	6-8
Writing	9	12

It is important to remember we have 2 ears and 1 mouth. It is a glib phrase but has merit in terms of something simple to remember when trying to increase our listening.

Conclusion

We all have Mental Health. Our knowledge and understanding is improving all the time but stigma and a lack of confidence may stop people from seeking help. Always encourage your peers to speak with staff at school, home, GP and so on, there is no shame in asking for help.