

What does Empathy mean to you?

What is Empathy? *Identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings and motives¹.*

Here are some items, that show empathy in the interview process.² *What would you add?*

- *Reflective/Active listening
- *supportive and knowledgeable consultation
- *sincerely compliment rather than denigrate (belittle)
- *avoid argument and direct confrontation
- *communicate respect for and acceptance of clients and their feelings
- *help clients recognize the discrepancies between where they are and where they hope to be
- *support self-efficacy (one's power or capacity to produced a desired result) and optimism; that is, focus on the clients' strengths to support the hope and optimism needed to make change
- *non-judgmental, collaborative relationship
- *listen rather than tell
- *provide support
- *adjust to rather than oppose client resistance

Techniques: *In an empathetic interview, showing warmth, respect, and understanding is emphasized.*

1. **Ask open-ended questions.** Open-ended questions cannot be answered with a single word or phrase. For example, rather than asking, "So you're here because you want to apply for . . .?" ask, "Tell me, what is it that brings you here today?"
2. **Listen reflectively.** Demonstrate that you have heard and understood the client by reflecting what the client said.
3. **Summarize.** It is useful to summarize periodically what has transpired up to that point in the interview session.
4. **Affirm.** Support and comment on the client's strengths, motivation, intentions, and progress.
5. **Elicit self-motivational statements.** Have the client voice personal concerns and intentions, rather than try to persuade the client that change is necessary.

In addition, when domestic violence is a factor:

1. Ask the client about safety concerns.
2. Avoid body language that is dismissive or intimidating. (e.g. not paying close attention to what the victim is saying; standing over the victim; crossing arms; touching)
3. Emphasize client control: "You are the best judge of what will work for you."
4. Avoid putting down the abuser, focus on behavior, not the person
5. Avoid saying anything that might appear to put blame on the client (i.e. "what did you do to set him off?" instead reinforce that "no one deserves to be abused.")
6. Offer factual information about domestic violence. "In training I learned . . .", "In this situation other clients have. . .",
7. Help the client examine options rather than a single course of action
8. You may express your concerns about safety, but avoid telling the client what to do.
9. Keep the door open - Make sure the client understands that plans break down; clients should not avoid future contact with you if things go wrong.

¹As defined by the American Heritage Dictionary

²Adapted from "Enhancing Motivation for Change in Substance Abuse Treatment" - TIP 35 - US Department of Health & Human Services