Ways to Build Empathy

What is empathy?

Empathy is understanding someone else's experiences and feeling their emotions alongside them. You don't have to agree with the person or have the same experiences to show empathy. By trying to understand and imagining yourself in their shoes, you can have empathy for them.

Why is empathy important?

Taking time to listen and have empathy shows someone that you care about them and helps them feel more comfortable opening up to you about their life. This strengthens your relationship and encourages them to be honest with you about when they could use support.

How to show empathy

DO's

Use body Language that shows you are listening

Body position
- Face them or sit next to them
- Rest your hands in your lap
- Nod your head occasionally as they talk
- Sit or stand in a similar position

Facial expressions
- Make small expressions that match the emotion being shared
- Try raising your eyebrows or a kind smile at the right time

Communicate you understand what they are saying

Repeat back what you heard
- "Ya, I'd be upset too if someone called me a liar."
- "It's really hard to get homework done with so much to do after school."

Ask "What" questions to learn more
- "What did he say that made you upset?"
- "What happened next?"
- "What are some things that make you feel better when you're down?"

DONT's

Do other things while they are talking
- Appearing distracted is a quick way to make someone feel like you don't care. Stop what you are doing and put down your phone so they know they have your full attention.
- If that is uncomfortable, sometimes doing a simple activity **together** can make it easier to talk. Try something like:
  - taking a walk, drawing/coloring, playing a game, or listening to music.

Downplay what they are telling you
- Even if you don't think something is a big deal, that doesn't mean it isn't hard for the other person. Downplaying or trying to quickly fix the problem so you can move on makes people not want to connect with you.
- Examples of what not to say:
  - "You'll be fine"
  - "You always act crazy"
  - "Why can't you just get over it"
  - "Just do what I do"

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