

# HABITUAL REACTIONS THAT TEND TO BLOCK CONNECTION

## 1. GIVING ADVICE, PROBLEM SOLVING, "FIXING" WITH PRESCRIPTIONS

- Listener tells the speaker what they should do.

## 2. STATIC JUDGEMENT / DIAGNOSING

- Listener interprets or evaluates speaker's behavior. Labels speaker with static judgement or diagnosis.
- "You're getting really defensive."

## 3. PERSONAL STORYTELLING

- Listener takes the focus away from speaker and tells stories relating back to themself.

## 4. SYMPATHY / FEELING SORRY FOR THE OTHER PERSON WITH PITY

- Listener shares their own feelings about what the speaker said rather than holding space to honor the speaker's feelings and needs.

## 5. DISMISSING DIFFICULT FEELINGS

- Listener tries to make the speaker feel better with dismissive comments, even if well-intentioned, like "everything is going to be okay."
- Listener tells the speaker that "there is no need to feel that way." Dismisses these feelings instead of holding space for them as indicators of unmet needs.

## 6. SARCASM

- Listener replies with sarcasm, attempts to make a joke or inject humor into conversation.

## 7. OVER-IDENTIFYING

- Listener assumes the speaker's story has to do with them; asks if there is something they can do and/or inserts themself into the narrative.

## 8. CHANGING THE SUBJECT

- Listener makes a connection to something the speaker says and decides to shift the topic.

## 9. INTERROGATING / LEADING QUESTIONS

- Listener uses directed or continued questioning to prompt speaker into explanation.
- Listener challenges speaker into "self-awareness."
- Subtle blame. New age bullying. Power over.

## 10. COMMISERATING

- Listener agrees with the speaker through over-identification; does not honor the uniqueness of speaker's position. ("I know exactly what you mean.")

## 11. ONE-UPPING

- Listener convinces the speaker that they've been through something worse than what the speaker is currently describing.

## 12. DEFENSIVENESS

- Listener is acutely sensitive to criticism where there is none intended, gets defensive or dismissive of the speaker. Listener focuses on perceived criticism instead of the speaker's unmet needs.

## 13. DEVILS ADVOCATE / EMPATHY FOR "OTHER"

- Listener plays devil's advocate or asks the speaker if they've considered the other person's perspective. Tries to empathize with the "other" before the speaker.

## 14. INTELLECTUALIZING

- Listener references expert opinion, academic studies, a book or article they recently read, or other "authoritative" source to make a point.

**DEFLECTIVE LISTENING:**

Characterized by the listener inserting themselves and becoming more absorbed, interested in, and committed to their own response rather than the feelings/needs of the person they were listening to.

**EMPATHY:**

A quality of being present with someone -- hearing, seeing, and receiving them patiently without trying to take them somewhere else.

**EMPATHETIC LISTENING:**

Being present without trying to change anything, the intent with empathetic listening is to hold a space for identifying the underlying needs. Listener asks him or herself: "What am I hearing the speaker say that they are longing for? What are the key qualities that they are speaking to?"

Empathetic listening is characterized by silent or spoken guesses as to the speaker's needs:

- "Are you wanting more structure and dependability?"
- "It sounds like flexibility is really important to you right now."
- "Are you hoping for some clarity and direction?"

Instead of giving advice, opinions, diagnosing, leading, storytelling, and so on, empathetic listeners receive people where they are at and support them in getting in touch with their needs. Empathetic listeners trust that the optimal environment to support someone is characterized by deep listening with needs awareness in a way that allows them to access their own resources and come up with their own strategies .

"Empathy forges communication that is inquisitive, nonjudgmental, validating, and compassionate. The primary thing that starts to happen when we communicate in this way is that it changes us, it softens us. We see the people in our lives in a different way."

- Paul Parkin

**NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION (NVC)**

Characterized by a set of distinctions and practices to facilitate needs awareness and empathetic listening, NVC provides a framework for speaking and listening in ways that foster connection and understanding.