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Empathic listening is a vital skill in both personal and professional contexts, fostering understanding, collaboration, and effective communication. For my empathic listening assignment, I talked with my friend for 30 minutes while we were baking pumpkin cheesecake together, which I think had an interesting impact on the conversation and my ability to listen empathically. The conversation took place while baking pumpkin cheesecake, lasting approximately 30 minutes. The conversation partner was a close friend, creating a comfortable and familiar environment. I will examine the empathic listening techniques I employed, instances where I deviated from empathic listening, and the impact of these techniques on the conversation's quality and content.

## I. Empathic Listening Techniques Employed

During the conversation, I employed several empathic listening techniques, which facilitated a deeper understanding of my friend's thoughts, emotions, and perspectives.

Reflecting Content and Feeling: Throughout the conversation, I consistently reflected my friend's content and feelings, acknowledging his statements and emotions. For example, about half way through the conversation (around the 15-minute mark), he was telling me a frustrating story about his roommates involving a meat thermometer being jammed in the garbage disposal. At face value, this anecdote seems like a humorous little story, but I wanted to encourage him to elaborate on his thoughts and emotions,

making him feel heard and valued. I asked how he felt about that situation happening because even though he was telling it like a joke, it seemed like he had different feelings about the situation than he was trying to portray, especially considering we've had past conversations about his frustrations about his roommates. I think he appreciated me asking further about how he was feeling about that because I noticed that his tone changed to more serious when he expressed his true feelings.

Open-Ended Questions: I used open-ended questions to encourage my friend to share more about his experiences and feelings. When he mentioned that he had applied for an internship in California for next semester around the 7 minute mark, I asked, "What are you most excited about when you think about the possibility of moving to California for a semester?" This open-ended question allowed my friend to delve into his thoughts and aspirations, providing valuable insights into what truly motivates and excites him about this potential opportunity. It also encouraged a deeper conversation about his expectations, hopes, and plans for the future. By using open-ended questions like this, I aimed to foster a more meaningful and enriching dialogue that went beyond simple yes-or-no answers, giving us a chance to connect on a deeper level.

Nonverbal Cues: I made sure to maintain nonverbal cues such as nodding and maintaining eye contact throughout the conversation to signal my active engagement in the conversation. These cues conveyed my attentiveness and empathy, reassuring my friend that I was fully present and receptive to his words.

## II. Deviations from Empathic Listening

While I predominantly practiced empathic listening during the conversation, there were moments when I deviated from this approach. These deviations hindered the depth of understanding and connection in the conversation.

**Autobiographical Responses:** At times, I found myself offering autobiographical responses, diverting the focus from my friend's experiences to my own. For example, when discussing the incident with the garbage disposal around the 15 minute mark, I shared a similar experience about having a frustrating experience with my own roommates. This shift in focus from his feelings to mine momentarily hindered empathic listening and transitioned into only active listening. I still had to listen actively to his story in order to formulate my own response that relates to his story. I don't think sharing my own experience necessarily hurt the conversation because it was still engaging for both of us, but it was simply no longer empathic listening at that point.

**Distractions:** Since we were doing another activity while we were having our conversation, there were several instances when I allowed external distractions, such as cleaning up or searching for utensils, to briefly divert my attention from the conversation. For example, around the 20 minute mark, I had finished mixing the cheesecake filling and I had tasted it. I got very excited about the success of our cheesecake filling that I interrupted the conversation to have him taste it, which did not

demonstrate empathic listening. These lapses and distractions reduced my ability to empathically listen during those moments.

### III. Impact on the Conversation

The application of empathic listening techniques had a positive impact on the quality and content of the conversation. It fostered a sense of trust, emotional connection, and openness, enabling my friend to share his thoughts and feelings freely. When I reflected his content and emotions, he responded by providing more elaborate responses and sharing personal anecdotes related to our discussion. This facilitated a deeper and more meaningful conversation.

Conversely, when I deviated from empathic listening by offering autobiographical responses or succumbing to distractions, the conversation's quality was momentarily compromised. These lapses disrupted the flow and depth of the dialogue, making it less focused on my friend's experiences.

### IV. Reflection on Empathic Listening

Empathic listening allowed me to accomplish several important outcomes during the conversation. First, it deepened my understanding of my friend's feelings and perspectives, strengthening our friendship. Second, it created a safe and supportive

space for him to express himself openly. Third, it enhanced my communication skills, reinforcing the importance of active listening in fostering connections.

In retrospect, I believe I effectively employed empathic listening techniques, particularly reflecting content and feeling and using open-ended questions. These techniques encouraged my friend to share more and created an atmosphere of trust and understanding. However, there is room for improvement in avoiding distractions and minimizing autobiographical responses.

## Conclusion

Empathic listening is a powerful tool for building relationships, enhancing communication, and fostering understanding. During the conversation while baking pumpkin cheesecake, I successfully employed empathic listening techniques, creating a space for my friend to share his thoughts and emotions openly. Despite occasional deviations from empathic listening, the overall impact on the conversation was positive, strengthening our connection and deepening our understanding of each other. This experience reinforces the significance of empathic listening in personal and professional interactions and highlights opportunities for continued growth in this essential skill.