



What Are Empathy Blockers?

Effective relational help-giving depends on rich relationships between caregivers and early interventionists. Providers can sometimes use statements and body language that create emotional distance and are counterproductive to using a coaching interaction style. Actions and language that cause barriers between early intervention coaches and caregivers are called empathy blockers. Awareness of common empathy blocking habits can transform providers' approaches, helping to restore and maintain healthy relationships and effective capacity-building practices.

Instead of...

Assuming leads to misunderstandings, interruptions, and falling onto bias. "I know where you are going with this..."

Try...

Active listening is providing silence and focusing on the caregiver's words, waiting to respond until the caregiver finishes sharing. "I hear these as your concerns...."

Instead of...

Providing directive feedback and unsolicited advice feels condescending. "I think you should...."

Try...

Reflecting on alternatives is capacity building. "What ideas do you have ..." or "What do you need to know to...."

Instead of...

Downplaying is disregarding the feelings of the caregiver. "Don't worry," or "I've seen worse..."

Try...

Using authenticity helps to validate emotions and experiences. "What's a small step that you feel comfortable taking?"

Instead of...

Storytelling is making the moment about you instead of the caregiver's situation. "Let me tell you what happened to me..."

Try...

Connecting helps by digging deeper into the caregiver's experiences and perspectives. "Tell me more about"

Instead of...

Daydreaming is losing eye contact, lack of head nods, and other nonverbal cues expressing disinterest. It's easy to notice and dispiriting.

Try...

Engaging means providing eye contact, nodding, facing the speaker, tuning out distractions, and giving attention to the focus of the caregiver.

Instead of...

Judging is using overriding statements or critical tone of voice that can be interpreted as criticizing caregivers or their ideas. "That's not going to work..."

Try...

Encouraging reflection happens when asking open-ended questions that solicit ideas and promote collaboration. "What did you do to make that happen?" or "How did you know you needed to try something different?"