

Speaking with Employees: How to Provide Support & Empathy

It can be difficult to know what to say when employees come to you with struggles. Below are some tips on how to listen and how to provide support and empathy.

1. Listen

Focus on the employee to help them feel heard and supported. Show that you are paying attention through your body language (make eye contact, lean forward, etc.) and by posing open-ended questions (What do you need right now? What is helping you cope now?).

Resist the urge to argue or suggest solutions.

2. Reflect

Demonstrate that you are paying attention and want to learn from their point of view. You might restate the message in your own words or label the emotion you hear, then ask if your interpretation is correct.

Resist the temptation to insert your own judgment.

3. Respond

Offer empathy to the employee by letting them know that you heard their concerns and appreciate the courage it takes to reach out. Help the employee get connected to resources that could help address their concerns (Student Assistance Program, employer policies, etc.).

You do not have to agree with the employee to validate their right to their feelings and experiences.

All these tools take practice. You may not be confident at first, but the most important thing is to show that you are trying. Kindness, compassion, empathy, and listening go a long way. You will notice a positive difference if you practice these skills in your personal life as well as your professional life.

For assistance or further guidance, call the Student Assistance Program.