



## 10 Obstacles to Empathic Communication

Some common forms of communication that block empathy and take the focus away from the speaker:

1. **Giving Advice / Fixing:** Tell the other person what you think they should do.  
*“I think you should leave your boyfriend and find somebody else to be with.”*
2. **Analyzing:** Interpreting or evaluating a person’s behavior  
*“I think you are taking this out on your ex-wife when you are actually frustrated about your divorce.”*
3. **Storytelling:** Moving the focus away from the other and back to your own experience.  
*“I know just how you feel. This reminds me of a time that I...”*
4. **Sympathy:** Either feeling sorry for other, or sharing my own feelings about what they said.  
*“Oh, you poor thing... I feel so sad for you.”*
5. **Reassuring / Consoling:** Trying to make the person “feel better” by telling them things will improve.  
*“You might be upset now, but I’m sure you will feel better soon.”*
6. **Shutting Down:** Discounting a person’s feelings and trying to shift them in another direction.  
*“Quit feeling sorry for yourself,” or, “There is no reason to feel that way!”*
7. **Correcting:** Giving the person *your* opinion or belief about a situation.  
*“Wait a minute – I never said that!” or, “You don’t remember this accurately.”*
8. **Interrogating:** Using questions to ‘figure out’ or change the person’s behavior.  
*“When did this begin?” or, “Why did you decide to do that?” or, “What got into you?”*
9. **Commiserating:** Agreeing with the speaker’s judgments of others.  
*“I know what you mean – your cousin is one of the biggest jerks I have ever met!”*
10. **One-upping:** Convincing the speaker that whatever they went through, you had it worse.  
*“You think that’s bad? Let me tell you what happened to me when I was in that situation!”*