

# Metro North Health CULTURE & ENGAGEMENT



## Empathy circle

**Time:** Approximately 40 minutes.

**Materials needed:** None.

**Participants:** Small groups of 3-6 people.

**Values in Action:** Compassion, Teamwork, Respect, Integrity, High Performance.

**Outcomes:** Builds empathy, trust, and psychological safety by strengthening respectful communication and active listening.

## Purpose

This activity helps team members connect on a deeper level through active listening and shared reflection. It creates a safe space for everyone to feel heard — without interruption, judgment, or debate — promoting stronger relationships, mutual respect, and team performance.

## How to run the activity

### Step 1: Create the empathy circle (3 minutes)

- Explain the intent of the activity:
  - *“Today we’ll practice deep, respectful listening — where the goal isn’t to respond, solve, or advise, but simply to understand and be present with each other.”*
- Form a circle. Emphasise:
  - **Compassion:** Listening with care.
  - **Integrity:** Valuing every perspective.
  - **Teamwork:** Making space for all voices.
  - **Respect:** No interruptions, no fixing — just presence.

### Facilitator tips:

*Model first:* Be the first to speak or reflect if needed.

*Set the tone:* Reassure the group this is a safe space.

*Make it fun:* Try using a prop like a “speaker’s hat” or “listening stone” to signal who’s speaking.

## Step 2: Share your thoughts (5–7 minutes)

Choose a discussion topic (or let the group decide). Suggestions:

- *“What inspires you to do your best work?”*
- *“When did you feel most supported by a team?”*
- *“What’s a value that matters most to you at work?”*
- *“What does respect, or inclusion look like in your role?”*

Take turns — one person speaks for 2–3 minutes while others listen silently and respectfully.

## Step 3: Reflect and respond (5 minutes per round)

After each person finishes, invite brief responses from the listeners:

- 1 clarifying question or a short, heartfelt reflection.
- No debating, problem-solving, or advice-giving.

**Sample listener responses:**

- *“That really resonated with me...”*
- *“I appreciate you sharing that. I hadn’t thought about it that way.”*
- *“How do you think we could bring that into our daily work?”*

Rotate roles so each person has a turn to speak and listen.

## Step 4: Group reflection (5–10 minutes)

Gather the group to reflect together. Ask:

- *“How did it feel to speak without interruption?”*
- *“What surprised you while listening?”*
- *“Did you feel more connected to your colleagues?”*
- *“How can we bring more empathy into our team culture?”*

**Optional prompts:**

- *“Did anyone’s story shift your thinking?”*
- *“What did you notice about your urge to respond or solve while listening?”*
- *“Did you feel more valued or seen after being heard?”*

## Step 5: Takeaways and action (5 minutes)

Invite each participant to share one small action they’ll take to practise empathy and deep listening at work. Some examples include:

- *“I’ll pause longer before jumping in during meetings.”*
- *“I’ll focus more on asking than advising.”*
- *“I’ll give space for others to speak first.”*

## Step 6: Key takeaways (10 minutes)

Wrap up with a summary of shared insights:

- Listening is a powerful act of respect
- Compassion and integrity create space for stronger teams
- Small changes in how we communicate lead to better trust and collaboration
- Everyone has a voice — and it matters

## Optional variations

**Themed circles:** Tailor to a topic like change, teamwork, inclusion, or wellbeing

**Walking empathy circles:** Pair up and walk while doing the activity outdoors

**Timed rotations:** Use a timer for rounds to keep energy and flow

**Journaling add-on:** Give a few minutes after each round for personal reflection