

Guide to Empathy Talks

What is the goal of Empathy Talks?

Empathy Talks are a pathway to creating micro-moments of connection and reflection on sticky issues of community concern. They offer ways to feel heard and seen each other, be more reflective, and change perspectives on issues impacting our livelihoods and futures.

By bringing together diverse voices in the field Empathy Talks also aim to build capability and practices leading to system transformation.

Who and what are they for?

They are for anyone addressing topics impacting their communities at scale, on matters of social, environmental and cultural importance.

Empathy Talks have been used for topics such as:

- Relationships and influence in education in Michigan, USA
 - Polluting habits and heating systems in Silesia, Poland
 - Pandemic and politics in Berlin, Germany
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Top 3 things to know

#1. We recommend at least two weeks' lead time for planning a Talk. This gives you time to invite participants, work out where and when the Talk will be held, do a practice run or two, and get the Activity Board ready.

#2. Who plays the Facilitator role is an important decision. Read the Preparation board for more information on Facilitator tasks and responsibilities.

#3. Empathy Talks are about finding common ground, not finding solutions. They are an invitation to listen, feel and sense what others share.

Getting started

You'll find all the information, preparation checklists and activity materials you need at:

empathytalks.com

Timing and location

An Empathy Talk takes 1.5-2 hours, depending on the number of participants.

It can be done in-person using cards, or online. See empathytalks.com **Downloads** for materials.

Wherever you choose to hold an Empathy Talk, it's important the space feels inviting and trustworthy and is neutral for all participants. Keep comfort in mind.

Roles and numbers

An Empathy Talk is made up of 5-6 people. There are 3 different roles, which should be agreed in advance during Talk preparation:

Facilitator (1): Invites and facilitates the process of an Empathy Talk. Hands out cards. Holds space, keeps things on track.

Speaker (1): Someone from the community who wishes to express their feelings and needs around a topic, potentially where they feel unheard.

Listeners (3-4): Others from the community who listen to the Speaker with respect, build upon what has been said, and contribute in a way that moves the conversation forward.

Role cards with further descriptions are provided in this kit, and on the Preparation Template. We recommend handing them out at the start of the Talk, to remind everyone about their role and expectations.

Credits and acknowledgements

Empathy Talks were developed by the Systemic Design Group as educational experiments for EIT Climate-KIC. We thank EIT Climate-KIC, friends and industry peers for their valuable ideas and contributions.

