

Process: How will we listen?



In this section, we'll talk through the actual process of rolling out empathy interviews in your school or organization.



Connect Considering the activities from earlier in this session, what are some ideas we should consider when *facilitating empathy interviews*?

Build See the following pages for examples and ideas.

Who hosts

Students, adults, or both? How are they chosen and trained?

How many conversations

Group size? How are groups formed? How many in total?

Consent

Opting out ahead of time or in the moment. Then what?

If something serious comes up

Who the host tells, and what that procedure looks like.

When and where

An advisory block, a class everyone takes, a set time, pull-outs?

How will participants be invited?

Who sends it, when, and what does it say?

Recording and privacy

If and how it's recorded, who reads it, how names are handled.

Afterward

When and how participants hear what happened.

Revise Walk through interview day as each of these people. Does your plan account for them?

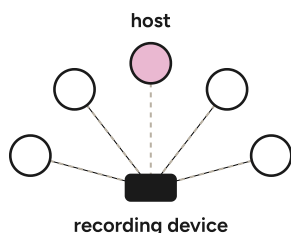
- A student whose family returned the opt-out form
- A student who's learning English
- A host whose group goes quiet after the first question
- A participant who names a teacher, or says something that worries the host
- A student who's absent that day

Example facilitator guide

For student and adult hosts.

Before you press record

- Sit close, in a semicircle around the recording device.
- Record a few seconds and play it back to check that you can hear everyone.
- Have the questions and this page in front of you.



Read this aloud (putting it in your own words is fine)

To help our school understand what our community thinks, we're recording this conversation. It'll be shared with educators here, without anyone's name on it. If you'd rather not take part, you can leave at any time, and you can pass on any question.

A few ground rules. Listen respectfully: let people finish. Step up, step back: share, and make sure everyone gets a turn. Disagree kindly: it's okay to disagree, and we want to hear it. Take your time: you can pass, and we'll come back to you. Don't use anyone's name: say "a teacher" or "a student" instead.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Asking the questions

- Read the question, then wait. Count to ten in your head before you say anything. Most silence is people thinking, and people tend to start sharing after a little awkward silence.
- If someone looks stuck: "Take your time." "It can be anything that comes to mind." "Want me to read it again?"
- If someone says "I don't know": "That's okay, let's think about it. Does anyone else want to start?"
- If the conversation drifts somewhere related, let it. If students start talking about homework during a question about English class, that's worth following up on. If it goes somewhere unproductive, remind participants of the purpose of the conversation and redirect.
- You don't have to finish every question.

Going deeper

- Ask why as much as possible, or: "Tell me more about that." "What do you mean by ___?" "Can you give an example?" "What did that feel like?" "Who else do you think this affects?"
- Echo: repeat their last few words as a question. "...nobody noticed?" Most people will share more.
- Try not to lead answers by sharing your own opinion. Instead, you can offer several hypothetical ones: "Some people say X, others have said Y. Do either of these connect to your experience? Or something else?"

Making room for everyone

- Invite instead of calling on: "We haven't heard from everyone yet. Anyone want to add something? It's okay to pass."
- If one person is doing most of the talking: "Thanks. We want to make sure we hear from everyone. Let's hear a couple of other people on this one."
- Disagreement is useful. "Sounds like you've had pretty different experiences. Why do you think that is?" Don't push the group toward agreeing or debating.

When something goes sideways

- **A name comes up.** Remind the group of the norm and ask them to say it again with "a teacher" or "a coach."
- **Someone says something hurtful.** If it isn't serious enough to stop the conversation, acknowledge it, cool things down ("Let's make sure everyone feels okay sharing"), and move on. Tell the supporting adult afterward.
- **Someone keeps derailing.** Remind them what the conversation is for. If it keeps happening, get an adult's attention.
- **Someone says they're being hurt, might hurt someone, or isn't safe.** Let them finish. Don't ask for details. Tell the supporting adult immediately after the conversation.

Closing

- "Is there anything else anyone wants to talk about?" or "Is there anything we talked about that you want to add more to?"
- Thank everyone for participating, and let them know what the plans are for using these conversations.
- Stop and submit the recording.

Who does what

	Before	During	After
Coordinator Often an educator	Schedules conversations and forms groups. Sends the family letter two weeks out. Tests devices. Plans what opted-out students will do.	Moves between rooms, helps stuck groups, handles interruptions.	Checks every recording is in and stored securely. Tells participants when they'll hear back.
Host	Goes to training. Prepares using the facilitator guide. Tests the recording.	Reads the opening and norms, asks questions and follow-ups, runs the recording.	Submits the recording. Tells the supporting adult if anything went wrong.
Supporting adults	Know who has opted out. Set up the room.	Stay nearby but outside the circle. Step in when facilitation help or tech support is needed. Have something quiet ready for early finishers.	Debrief with hosts.

Fitting conversations into the school day

Approach	How it works	Notes
Advisory, homeroom, or equivalent	Conversations happen in the room during the regular period.	The simplest option if your schedule already has one.
One class many students take that isn't "tracked" (e.g. ELA 9, Biology)	Pick a course and run conversations in every section over a day.	The host teacher needs almost no prep.
A scheduled time	Change the schedule for one day so everyone talks at the same time.	More planning up front, but everyone gets heard. This also takes a lot of hosts, though you can run it by assigning hosts on the day and handing them facilitator guides.
Pull-out groups	Small groups leave class for a separate recording space, spread over several days.	The hardest to run: coverage, passes, and missed work. Start with one of the others if you can.

One class taught across five periods at 30 students each is 150 students; at five per group (with six hosts), that's 30 conversations in a day.

Choosing and preparing student hosts

Students usually tell a classmate different things than they'd tell an adult, and students who host become partners in this work. That said, adult hosts make more sense in grades K to 5, and sometimes for family empathy interviews. If adults lead conversations, bring in adults who *aren't* familiar with the students being interviewed. Recruit student hosts beyond the usual leaders: students who may be disengaged, students who are quiet in class, and so on.

Our host trainings run about two hours:

- ① Students take part in an empathy interview themselves, as participants.
- ② They work through what each norm looks like when you're the host.
- ③ They practice in groups of three. One hosts; the others draw cards that ask them to roleplay specific issues (being very quiet, getting distracted).
- ④ They write or revise the questions (see Questions).
- ⑤ They set up and test a recording.
- ⑥ They agree not to share or "gossip" about what students said in these recordings.

All of our training materials for student hosts are at pd.humanrestorationproject.org.

Example family letter

Dear families,

This [month], students at [school] will take part in small-group conversations about their experience at school: what's going well and what could be better. Groups of four to six will meet during [advisory / English class] for about 30 minutes, led by [trained student hosts / staff].

We're doing this because [your focus, in one sentence]. What students say will help [who] decide [what]. We will be asking these questions:

[Your question list]

Conversations are recorded. Names are removed, and students are described only by grade (for example, "ninth-grade student"). [Who] will read the transcripts. [If you'll use AI:] With names removed, transcripts will be analyzed with help from [district-approved tool], and staff will check everything it finds. We'll share what we learned with students and families by [date].

Taking part is voluntary. Students can skip any question or leave at any time. If you'd prefer your child not take part, contact [name and email] by [date]. Students who don't take part will [alternative].

If a student says something that suggests they or someone else may be unsafe, staff will follow the school's usual reporting procedures.

Access

Plan for translated questions, hosts who speak students' home languages, extra time, a write-first option, and another way to contribute for anyone who'd rather not talk in a group.

Technology

- A built-in or USB microphone and a free recorder like Audacity work well. We find Chromebook mics are more than fine.
- Otter, Sonix, or the free, open-source Whisper can transcribe. Whatever service you use, make sure it's secure and doesn't sell or train on recordings.
- Store files where only secure accounts can access them, and decide when you'll delete them.
- Remove names, including teachers' and classmates'.
- If you use AI at any point, know that company's policies on selling or training on your data.

An example timeline

September	Planning meeting with adults.
October	A two-hour training for about 20 student hosts in grades 6 to 12.
November to December	Each host leads about five conversations, roughly 100 in all, scheduled building by building.
January	The same students come back to make sense of the results with adults and write recommendations.
March	Students present their findings to educators and administrators.
April	Educators make explicit plans for meeting student needs and report them back to the student body.