



Tool: Facilitate Empathy Interviews and Focus Groups

What are Empathy Interview/Focus Groups?

- **Empathy Interviews**
 - 1:1 interviews that help you see the world through the eyes of your community members, understand their feelings, appreciate them as human beings and communicate your understanding.
 - Best when you want to gather insights from someone who is more comfortable in a 1:1 setting.
- **Focus Groups**
 - Group empathy interviews of about 6-10 diverse members that help uncover insights into their experiences as a group.
 - Best when you want to learn from a group's experience and they are comfortable sharing honestly in a group setting.

Why run Empathy Interview/Focus Groups? They provide valuable perspective that can influence and shape the direction of your school transformation. They give you permission to take the time to listen deeply to the needs, concerns and celebrations of your community members.

Empathy Interviews Tips	Focus Group Tips
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Build rapport.● Ask about specific instances or occurrences ("Tell me about the last time..")● Encourage stories.● Don't suggest answers to your questions.● Ask neutral questions like "What do you think about...?"● Ask once, clearly● Explore emotions like "Why do you feel...?" "What do you feel about...?" Find more tips here.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Build rapport.● Designate a notetaker (or consider recording with consent of the participants and digesting content after the interview)● Notice when there are voices dominating the conversation or others that are silent. Ensure equity of voice by helping everyone have an opportunity to share.● Encourage discussion and different opinions. There are no "wrong answers."● Encourage participants to speak their truth.● Avoid groupthink by allowing for individual reflection and opinions before sharing.

(Tips adapted from [High Tech High Graduate School of Education](#))



Empathy Interviews & Focus Group Protocol

Roles

- Facilitator
- Observers/Notetaker
- Interviewee/Focus Group [student, staff, leader, or family/community member]

Welcome and Introductions (3–5 minutes)

- Introduce your names/roles, and grade levels if applicable.
- Everyone shares a quick fun fact, something you're looking forward to, or something you hope to learn through this process.
- Facilitator shares the protocol and purpose of the interview.
The purpose of this interview is to gain insight into your unique experience as [student, staff member, leader, family member]. We seek to listen deeply and learn from your stories. Thank you for meeting with us today to share your perspective. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Possible Interview Questions* (20–40 minutes)

- What do you love about school?
 - Tell me about a time when you felt successful at school? What happened? Who was there? Why was this significant?
 - What challenges have you faced at school? Why was it difficult? What could have been done to make it better?
 - How does it feel to be a [student, staff member, leader, family/community member] at your school? What is it like to be you for a day?
 - If you could lead the school, what would you change? What would you want to keep the same?
 - Is there anything else we have not yet discussed that you would like to share?
- See more questions specifically for students [here](#)

Gratitude and Next Steps (2 minutes)

- Facilitator shares gratitude for the time and effort it took for these insights to be shared and offers next steps regarding how these insights will be utilized.

Facilitator Debrief After the Interview or Focus Group (20 minutes):

- Do this independently or with other facilitators
- Choose an empathy map protocol to process the insights you gathered
- Reflect on the following additional questions:
 - What insights did you gain about the experiences and emotions surfaced during the interview?
 - How might these insights challenge our existing assumptions or highlight new perspectives?
 - What is something we are still grappling with or need more information to better understand?
- Make a plan to share insights, reflections and next steps with the broader community



Empathy Interviews/Focus Groups Note-Catcher

Add your empathy interview/focus group questions below and then take notes on what you hear from each interview. Or draft your questions and then create a Google Form to use to take notes and collect answers in a Google Sheet.

Interviewee(s): (Name, role/grade/age)	
Questions	Notes



Empathy Mapping After Interviews: Bright Spots & Key Problems

Empathy maps are a useful way to visualize data from interviews to better understand and uncover the needs expressed by your interviewee.

Purpose: To clarify data from interviews, process information visually, eliminate bias and uncover other needs missed during the interview process in an effort to move towards improvement.

How to Use: Using your interview data, reflect on the following questions: What were bright spots you heard (things that made you feel good that you want to keep doing) during the interview? What are key opportunities that came up for you from hearing the interviewee's perspective? What surprised you that you want to remember? What are you wondering now after having this interview?

Bright Spots & Key Problems:

Bright Spots

Key Opportunities

Surprises

Wonders



Empathy Mapping After Interviews: Say, Think, Do, Feel

Empathy maps are a useful way to visualize data from interviews to better understand and uncover the needs expressed by your interviewee.

Purpose: To clarify data from interviews, process information visually, eliminate bias and uncover other needs missed during the interview process in an effort to move towards improvement.

How to Use: Using your interview data, share what the interviewee said by adding direct quotes to the "Say" section. Then, analyze how the interviewee was thinking in the "Think" section. Share evidence of what the interviewee said they did in the "Do" section. In the "Feel" section, consider what the interviewee is excited about, worried about, or reflect on any other emotions shared.

Say, Think, Do, Feel:

Say	Think
Do	Feel