3.1 Engaging the Art of Empathic Active Listening:
A Guide for Nurturing Relationships in the Digital Age and beyond

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Introduction

The value of listening in communication is often not fully recognised, even less so in today's digital age, in a world where the pace of life is increasing, technologies are advancing, and changing the way we communicate. The act of listening is not merely the transmission of words, but the sensitive balance between understanding and connection. When we listen actively, we unlock the gateway to impactful interpersonal exchanges which can be created as a key to building relationships of trust.

Empathy is the driving force behind active listening. It involves understanding, compassion, and emotional connection. Listening to someone's concerns means giving them a space to be heard without immediately trying to solve their problems.

For parents, educators, and professionals who work with children, Empathic Active Listening has the power to be a game-changer. It builds trust and respect, creating a solid foundation for communication.

A Guide to Effective Communication in a Digital Age (and Beyond)

This guide is designed to equip parents, educators, and child-focused professionals with the skills required to use the Empathic Active Listening methodology when communicating with children in the context of Internet Safety and Internet Risks.

In today's digital landscape, building strong communication between adults and children is like constructing a solid bridge. As children navigate the online world—full of both beneficial stimuli and potential pitfalls—they not only need to understand how to recognise risks, but also feel confident to reach out to adults they trust when they need help. But more than that, it's crucial to create a sturdy foundation of trust that goes both ways. This foundation is built on something simple yet powerful: really listening to each other. Genuine listening can create a safe space where children feel confident sharing their thoughts and worries, even if the grown-ups don't have all the answers. This special way of communication is a precious tool. It helps adults and children connect deeply, not just when things are easy, but when they're tough too. In this scope, in a world that is getting more and more digitalised, the Empathic Active Listening methodology can act as a guiding star that helps children and adults talk honestly about everything, including the exploration of the digital world.

Additionally, it should be emphasised that the Empathic Active Listening methodology extends beyond the specific context of internet safety and risks. The essence of this technique can be a powerful tool for building and strengthening adult-child relationships in various aspects of life. Whether you are a parent discussing school challenges with your child, a teacher addressing classroom issues, or a mentor guiding a young person through life's complexities, Empathic Active Listening fosters trust and connection. It enables adults to create a safe space where children feel heard and valued, not only in digital matters but in their overall development. So, while the primary focus of this guide is on the digital realm, keep in mind that the principles of Empathic Active Listening can be a fundamental asset in nurturing healthy adult-child relationships in any situation. Here's a sneak peek into what the guide offers across four key aspects:

1. **Grasping Empathic Active Listening:** Explore Empathic Active Listening as a concept and learn how Empathic Active Listening can significantly impact children's well-being through creating a more supportive environment.

2. **Key Attitudes & Practical Strategies:** Explore a variety of attitudes and strategies that promote understanding and connection, establishing a solid foundation for effective communication and the flourishing of Empathic Active Listening.

3. **Applying Empathic Active Listening in Everyday Interactions: Examples of Empathic Active Listening in Different Settings:** Explore how the methodology can be used in daily interactions, with the help of distinct examples that will be relevant to parents/guardians, teachers, and professionals working with children.

4. **Putting Empathic Active Listening into Action: Real-life scenarios and role-playing games for practising the methodology:** Gain practical experience by actively engaging in various activities, such as real-life discussions across different scenarios, role-playing games, quizzes, and reflective exercises. This is your opportunity to take ownership of your learning journey, putting into practice what you've gained from studying the guide.

As you explore this guide, you'll uncover the power of Empathic Active Listening in forging stronger connections with children. It's about creating a bridge of understanding between adults and children in an increasingly digital world.

1. Grasping Empathic Active Listening: A Theoretical Framework

Let's start by exploring some core concepts that are related to Empathic Active Listening.

Verbal & Non-Verbal Communication

Communication is a complex and fundamental aspect of human interaction that traces its origins to our earliest times. Emerging from the Latin term "communis", denoting "shared", communication acts as the channel through which we exchange information, thoughts, and feelings, forming the bedrock of human relationships[1].

Scholars present varying perspectives on communication. Some characterise it as the transfer of information between a sender and a receiver[2], while others view it as a reciprocal engagement involving messages or data[3]. This process entails participants collaborating to convey concepts and emotions, encompassing a sender, receiver, and a range of communication cues[4].

Recent research conducted by Gabor et al. delves into breakdowns in communication, uncovering that a mere 7% relies on verbal content, whereas 38% comprises vocal nuances, leaving a significant 55% contingent on non-verbal cues. Conversations lean on less than 35% verbal communication, with non-verbal cues taking precedence[5].

Communication transcends its role as a mere conduit for sharing information—it functions as the adhesive binding us together. It melds language with gestures, surmounting linguistic barriers and forming the basis of our collective human journey.

Non-verbal communication encompasses the entirety of an individual's expressions and actions during interaction, excluding spoken words. This encompasses a wide array of signals and body language employed when conveying messages[6]. Within this realm, nonverbal communication resides in an individual's eye movements, facial and hand gestures, and body language, all of which convey profound emotions and attitudes regarding the information being conveyed[7].

Empathy

When we talk about empathy, we mean the ability to *feel* the emotions of others, *understand* their behaviour, *and communicate* that understanding to them[8].

To show empathy while communicating with another person, is to let the other person know that we experience the same feelings he or she feels, putting ourselves in the other person's shoes, getting, for a moment, inside his or her mind[9], and grasping, from the speaker's point of view, just what it is that is communicated to us. More than that, we must *convey* to the speaker that we are seeing

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[1] Beaver, 2002

[2] Zalvanos, 2008

[3] Babiniotis, 2005

[4] Munodawafa, D., 2008

[5] Gabor, Baritz and Repanovici, 2014

[6] Mandal, 2014

[7] Gabor, Baritz and Repanovici, 2014

[8] Lam, Kolomitro and Alamparambil, 2011

[9] Gordon Training International, 2011

things from his or her point of view[10].

It should be noted that empathy is different from sympathy and compassion, even though the three terms are often used interchangeably. In relation to compassion and sympathy, which are regarded to be more passive approaches, empathy entails a much more active effort to comprehend another person[11][12].

When it comes to relationships between adults and children, empathy refers to the ability of adults to put themselves in the shoes of children, see the world from their perspective, and comprehend their experiences. This can be more challenging in adult-child relationships because it involves applying this empathetic understanding to the unique developmental needs of children. Typically, children are in a phase of growth and development, often lacking the emotional vocabulary and cognitive skills to fully express their feelings. This means that adults must use a highly sensitive form of empathy, one that can bridge the gap between the child's limited ability to express themselves and the depth of their emotional experiences. However, it is worth the effort because by nurturing empathy as a fundamental aspect of their relationship with children, adults can provide children with a secure foundation for them to communicate their emotional experiences, which can have positive effects on their development[13].

Active Listening & Empathic Active Listening

Active listening is a communication *technique* that involves paying close attention to the other person's verbal and non-verbal cues, including his or her words, tone of voice, body language, and overall message, to gain a better understanding of his or her perspective. Simultaneously, the person who performs the technique of active listening employs his or her own words and body language to signal that she or he has genuine interest in comprehending the speaker's message[14]. This technique was given a name by Carl Rogers, one of the greatest psychologists of the 20th century[15]. Using this type of listening, the listener's main goal is to try to understand the speaker's point of view. The listener can also try to imagine himself/herself in the other person's shoes.

But how is active listening different than... listening? It all comes down to the term "active". Passive listening, like when the listener nods along without asking questions or sharing thoughts, is like a one-way street. It might leave the speaker wondering if his or her message was really understood. On the other hand, active listening is a game-changer. It's when the listener not only hears the words of the speaker but also responds in ways that show he/she truly grasps what's going on in the speaker's world. As Rogers and his co-author Richard Evans Farson put it in 1957, when listening actively, the listener "does not passively absorb the words which are spoken to him. Instead, an active listener actively tries to grasp the facts and the feelings in what she/he hears, and she/he tries, by her/his listening, to help the speaker work out her/his own problems".

Another point to emphasise when reading Rogers' words above, is the phrase "help the speaker work out her/his own problems". Active listening entails hearing a person with an open mind, without

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[10] Rogers & Farson, 1957
[11] Cherry, 2022
[12] Jeffrey, 2016
[13] Stern, Borelli & Smiley, 2015
[14] Campbell, 2021
[15] Owen, 2022

necessarily having an immediate solution to a problem. Nevertheless, this technique can indeed result in positive transformations for individuals. As Rogers suggests, when a person receives attentive and unique listening, he or she tends to become more emotionally mature, open to his or her experiences, less defensive, and more democratic. When people are listened to in a sensitive way, they are inclined to pay keener attention to their thoughts and emotions, facilitating clearer expression. Moreover, they are less concerned about criticism of their ideas and feel more confident about sharing them. Simultaneously, it's worth noting that the process of active listening also prompts the listener himself/herself to undergo personal change. Among various activities, listening stands out as a catalyst for deep, positive relationships and possesses the potential to positively influence the listener's attitudes[16].

Imagine a child sharing his or her school day. Passive listening might look like a simple nod or a "Hmm" without further interaction. But active listening takes it up a notch. It's when the adult says things like, "Wow, it sounds like you had a fun day exploring new things!". This lets the child know that the adult is not just hearing words, but he/she is getting a glimpse into the child's experiences. So, why does active listening matter? It nurtures a deeper child-adult connection. It tells the child that his or her thoughts and feelings are valued and understood.

Within this framework, it comes as no surprise that empathy is a vital element of this process, as it pertains to emotionally connecting with another person through identification, compassion, understanding, feeling, and insight. This is why the latest literature refers to active listening using the term *Empathic Active Listening*.

Empathic active listening is more about building strong connections and truly grasping what others need, want, and think. Delving beyond the surface of spoken words, Empathic Active Listening involves understanding the why and how behind them, allowing us to connect with the other person's emotional experience and extend our empathy. This type of listening doesn't just stop at the obvious or even the implied meaning; it reaches the underlying emotions.

By engaging in Empathic Active Listening, we establish a safe space where individuals can comfortably express their true selves. This foundation paves the way for sincere and open communication between both the speaker and the listener[17].

Empathic active listening is a structured method that includes particular ways of listening and asking questions. We will explore them in the following chapter.

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[16] Rogers & Farson, 1957
[17] Vengoechea, 2021

2. Key Attitudes & Practical Strategies for Successful Empathic Active Listening

Key Attitudes for Nurturing Empathic Bonds: **Genuineness, Empathy and Unconditional Positive Regard**

It should be emphasised that, for active listening to be truly effective, it must stem from the foundational attitudes of adults. Active listening cannot be put to use successfully as a method if the core beliefs of adults conflict with its essential principles. If attempted in such a way, the resulting actions may come across as insincere and vain, and children are likely to pick up on this[18].

There are three fundamental attitudes that adults should embrace in all their relationships, including those involving children, before engaging in Empathic Active Listening: Genuineness, Empathy, and Unconditional Positive Regard. These attitudes were originally introduced by Rogers as the "core conditions" necessary for therapists to effectively assist their clients. However, Rogers also stressed that these same attributes should ideally be present in a "fully functioning person". Consequently, these three qualities have become associated with a broader framework of human relationships and have proven to be invaluable guidance for adults looking to build nurturing relationships with children.

a) **Genuineness**: According to Rogers, Genuineness (also known as "Authenticity" or "Congruence" in academic literature) is the most crucial quality. It involves the ability to openly express one's thoughts and emotions within a relationship. Genuineness ensures that everyone in the relationship can be themselves and share their ideas and experiences without worrying about being judged. It's a state where both children and adults can comfortably be themselves during interactions, without the need to put on different masks to gain acceptance[19]. This genuineness creates an environment where both parties can mutually influence and touch each other's lives, promoting openness and connection[20] while building a foundation of trust. In this context, an authentic relationship between adults and children means that adults guide rather than try to control the children, allowing them the space to discover their own truths and embrace their genuine selves.

b) **Empathy:** It's not surprising that Empathy plays a crucial role in defining relationships where empathetic active listening can flourish. Empathetic adults engage in active listening and make an effort to comprehend a child's emotions and experiences from their point of view[21]. They refrain from imposing their own viewpoints on what the child openly expresses. Within this context, empathy, as an integral part of the overall culture surrounding interactions between adults and children, can contribute to the development of strong emotional bonds. These conditions are ideal for the practice of empathetic active listening.

c) **Unconditional Positive Regard:** Unconditional Positive Regard, which is another fundamental aspect of Rogers' theory, involves wholeheartedly accepting and appreciating a child without any conditions, regardless of their behaviour and

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[18] Rogers, 1957
[19] Heslop, 1992
[20] Gaylin, 1996
[21] Rogers, 1980

actions[22]. The idea of unconditional positive regard highlights showing warm and non-possessive respect for each person's uniqueness[23]. This approach is both meaningful and practical, signifying a true willingness to connect[24]. To manifest this attitude, several methods have been suggested. Firstly, <u>modifying words</u> to temper criticism with reassurance shows that despite disapproval of actions, fundamental respect remains unwavering[25]. Secondly, <u>focusing on feelings</u>, guiding children to reflect on their actions, fosters positive self-worth[26]. Lastly, <u>cultivating an relationship culture of unconditional positive regard</u> is key, supported by affirmations like having faith in growth despite mistakes[27].

Practical Strategies of Active Listening: Empathetic Annotations - Productive questions - Paraphrasing (The "LAFF" technique)

A few widely recognised techniques of active listening involve a) using empathetic annotations, b) asking productive questions, and c) paraphrasing the speaker's statements to exhibit attentiveness and confirm understanding[28].

The LAFF technique, introduced and tested by McNaughton et al., offers a practical way for two people to engage while valuing their perspectives. This strategy was tested on teacher-parent relationships but can be applied in various relationships, including that of adults-children.

<u>**"L"** for Listen, Empathise and Communicate Respect (using empathetic annotations)</u>
Starting with "L", adults should listen, empathise, and convey respect to children. This involves attentively hearing out concerns and responding with empathy. Demonstrating respect entails thanking children for reaching out, focusing on them, and using appropriate body language and facial expressions. Some useful expressions that we could use in this particular step are the following: "What would you like to talk about?", "I can understand why you are concerned, this is a serious problem", "I appreciate that you came to talk with me", etc.

<u>**"A"** for Ask Productive Questions</u>
The "A" step involves asking questions and gathering insights on the issue shared by children. This respectful inquiry helps understand the children's viewpoint. As gaining insight can only happen by advancing the conversation, it is advised to avoid asking closed-off questions that only require a "Yes" or "No" answer during this step. Instead, follow-up questions such as "What more can you tell me to help me understand?", "What would I see if I was there?", "Let's talk more about _____ (a person/a situation/a specific action); how did _____ make you feel?", or "Why do you think _____ (a person/a situation/a specific action) turned out/acted/reacted/spoke this way?", or "Did it turn out how you thought it would? Why or why not?" are more useful choices at this step. Even if children can't answer these questions, they are encouraged to think more about what they're trying

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[22] Rogers, 1957
[23] Rogers, 1959
[24] Heslop, 1992
[25] Cherry, 2018
[26] Good Therapy, 2015
[27] McMahon, 2013
[28] McNaughton & Vostal, 2010

to tell us and organise their thoughts so that it's easier for them to open up[29].

"**FF**" for Focus on what has been shared (by paraphrasing) & Find a first step

Moving to two "F's", with the first "F", adults focus on reviewing the issue by paraphrasing shared information to ensure accuracy, while displaying evidence of active listening. A good starting point is to use a signal phrase, such as "So, if I understand this correctly, what you are saying is…". It's important to keep the paraphrase brief and accurate, without leaving out any crucial details and at the same time making sure not to insert our own opinions, interpretations, or assumptions. To conclude the paraphrase, a question like "Am I on the right track?" is useful for adults to confirm if they've captured the intended meaning accurately.

The second "F" directs adults to find a starting point for addressing the issue. Immediate action is needed if the situation is dangerous, but most issues benefit from gathering more details and careful consideration. At this point, it is OK for adults to take some time to think about the next steps instead of taking action immediately. However it is important to communicate to the children that we will indeed take steps in helping them. For this reason it is very useful to use phrasing that involves the words "first step", such as "I think the first step is to get more information and then we will start to think about possible solutions together", or "As a first step, I'd like to meet with _____ (your teacher / your friends' parents/ the school's principal, etc.). I want to find out what they _____ (see/saw/hear/heard/know). After this, we will make a plan for next steps"[30].

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[29] Cooley, 2023

[30] McNaughton & Vostal, 2010

3. Applying Empathic Active Listening in Everyday Interactions: Examples of Empathic Active Listening in Different Settings

While Empathic Active Listening might seem familiar, putting it into practice is no simple task. Several hurdles can arise when attempting to listen to a conversation partner genuinely, energetically, and empathetically. The complexity grows even more apparent when this partner is not an adult, but a child.

As previously mentioned, it is important that effective active listening hinges on an authentic interest in the speaker. Yet, the demands and obligations of daily life, combined with the stress they bring, often hinder adults from truly engaging with others, including children. Fatigue from a demanding day, mundane tasks, or professional pressures can lead to surface-level responses, leaving little room for genuine listening.

As previously noted, these fleeting interactions don't go unnoticed by the speaker, whether on a conscious or subconscious level. Rogers asserts that if the listener's interest appears insincere, it can discourage the speaker from opening up in the future.

Additionally, active listening comes with personal risks. Understanding another person's emotions and experiences to the extent of momentarily shedding one's own beliefs and patterns is a challenging and discomforting process. However, this process, though demanding, brings benefits. Empathic active listening not only fosters deep, positive connections but also catalyses a transformative shift in the listener's attitudes, fostering personal growth[31].

While Empathic Active Listening isn't effortless, it's certainly attainable. With practice and patience, we can master this skill. The rewards extend not only to us but also to all our conversation partners, be it adults or children!

Empathic Active Listening in parenting, educational & professional settings

As mentioned above, Empathic Active Listening is strictly related with attitudes, namely Genuineness, Empathy and Unconditional Positive Regard, as well as with specific behavioural strategies, such as the LAFF technique. All these factors are considered important in the relationships that parents, teachers, and professionals who work with children build with kids. Below are some additional practical examples to help understand in which context and in what way adults can apply the principles of Empathic Active Listening when responding to children.

Practical examples in **parenting**

Example 1

Child: *Mom/Dad, I don't know what to do. Suddenly, everything changed, and I don't understand why my friend(s) at school stopped talking to me. They even removed me from the group chat we had on Viber. I don't understand what I did. I feel very frustrated.*

In this example, the child acknowledges their feelings and chooses to share them with the parent(s). They are facing a situation that triggers intense frustration. Attempting to grasp the child's situation

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[31] Rogers, 1957

and understand their emotions constitutes the first, crucial step in providing support. Utilising the phrase "I would feel very frustrated too in this situation", the parent(s) validate the child's emotions without casting doubt. Frustration is a universally human emotion, and experiencing it occasionally is normal. This sentence succinctly portrays the notions of "genuineness" and "empathy".

Moreover, as suggested by the LAFF technique, an effective method for the parent(s) to demonstrate empathic listening to their child is by engaging in the conversation using body language. For instance, nodding or maintaining eye contact during the discussion communicates that the parent(s) are present and actively attentive to the child's concerns. Additionally, to comprehend the child's emotions, the parent(s) can pose questions related to their feelings, such as "How do you feel about this?" or "Is there something that could help you feel better?". Through these approaches, the parent(s) establish a zone of trust and openness between themselves and the child, enabling the child to freely express their feelings in their own words.

Example 2

Child: *I stopped hanging out with my friend. I also told the others at school to stop hanging out with him/her. We also removed him/her from the group chat we had on Viber. I was very upset because he/she lied to me, and I felt I had to take action. But now he/she is alone, not talking to anyone, and I feel somewhat guilty about it.*

In this example, the child shares something that appears to be troubling him/her. He/she felt angry and likely feels remorseful about the situation with his/her friend. Emphasising the child's emotion is once again a crucial first step. It's essential for the child to recognise and label their own emotions. Asking the child about their feelings regarding their actions, for instance, can aid in a better understanding of their emotions. Criticising the child for their feelings is unlikely to yield desirable results. Instead, the parent(s) can assist them in connecting with their feelings and identifying the emotions the other child might be going through in this scenario.

Practical examples in **teaching**
Example 1

A teacher, after communicating with the parents of some students, discovers that there is a group chat among the students on a social networking app, like Viber, for instance. In this group, certain classmates post photos of a particular student along with mocking comments and derogatory remarks. In other words, the teacher is faced with a situation of online bullying.

In this specific scenario, it's very likely that the teacher may have mixed feelings towards both the students who engaged in these behaviours and the student who was the target of these actions. However, it's crucial for the teacher to acknowledge their own feelings and ensure that their feelings towards the students haven't changed due to the students' behaviour. One helpful approach that the teacher could initially adopt with the children involved in these actions is that of "word modification". Instead of saying, "Your behaviour was embarrassing and unacceptable", the teacher could express, "I appreciate your attitude and always will, but I am disappointed by your actions". This way, the teacher avoids directly criticising the children but expresses disapproval of their specific behaviour.

Similarly, the LAFF technique could be a valuable tool in the teacher's hands to initially approach the student who experienced bullying behaviour. The first and very important step of LAFF, as mentioned

earlier, involves the teacher attentively listening to the student by applying principles of empathy. Phrases such as "Thank you for coming today to talk", "I greatly appreciate your trust and willingness to share with me", and "You're very brave to speak about something so important" are statements that acknowledge the student's courage to discuss their feelings while also demonstrating the teacher's readiness to stand by the child. Subsequently, if the child is willing to talk about their experiences, the teacher could proceed with open-ended follow-up questions to better understand the child's perspective and feelings. In this way, a safe space is created where the child can express their emotions, while allowing the teacher to comprehend how the child is experiencing the current situation. Following the principles of Empathic Active Listening, the teacher could further advance to the final steps of the LAFF technique by summarising and restating what has been said, ensuring that they have accurately grasped the situation, as well as by reassuring the child that she/he will take steps towards further understanding the situation and finding a possible solution. This approach helps secure a precise intervention and support plan. The specific example used here demands immediate action and mobilisation on the teacher's part. Searching for appropriate sources of help is necessary to ensure the right intervention and support for all of the children involved in this hypothetical scenario.

Practical examples in **professional settings**

Example 1

A professional implements preventative educational programs for students concerning various child-related topics. During a presentation, a student/child uses their mobile phone and refrains from engaging in the educational session.

The behavioural technique LAFF could provide useful insights for addressing this situation. The initial step involves initiating a conversation with the child and attentively listening to their perspective. To enhance active listening, we can employ body language, maintain eye contact, and nod during the discussion to convey our interest. Another critical aspect is to pose questions to the child, facilitating a deeper understanding of their viewpoint. In this specific case, potential questions might include: "I noticed you seemed less engaged during the presentation. Is something bothering you?", "How did you find the presentation? Was there something different you'd like us to discuss?". Subsequently, it's equally important to verify his/her comprehension of the conversation with the child. This can be achieved through paraphrasing their words, employing phrases like "I want to ensure I've grasped everything, so I'd like to confirm with you…" or "Just to clarify, am I understanding correctly that...?". The final stage of this technique pertains to the professional's response to the issue at hand. Depending on the issue's severity, he/she needs to decide whether to address it immediately or at a later time.

Example 2

A professional implementing a preventative educational program for students regarding safe internet use visits a school to conduct an interactive presentation. Following the presentation, a student approaches the professional and confides in them about a problem. The student is receiving abusive and insulting messages from an unfamiliar sender and is unsure how to address it.

It's crucial to understand that speaking up about such challenges can be extremely difficult for a child. When confronted with such adversity, a child is likely to grapple with intense emotions like sadness, fear, anxiety, anger, and guilt. The paramount duty of the professional in this situation is to provide support and listen attentively to the child's concerns. It's essential to create a safe and

trusting space where the child can openly express themselves. Additionally, the child must be reassured that they aren't accountable for the situation. Practical steps to safeguard themselves and insights into their support network can be discussed with the child. It's vital to validate the child's feelings without questioning what they are saying. By stating, "What you're sharing with me is extremely important, and to assist you in the best way possible, we will need to seek help", the professional conveys his/her comprehension of the gravity of the situation and informs them that he/she'll seek appropriate assistance.

4. Putting Empathic Active Listening into Action: Real-life scenarios and role-playing games for practising the methodology

Now, let's turn theory into action! In this section, we've designed some interactive exercises to help you gain a practical understanding of the concepts you've explored in the earlier theoretical sections of the guide.

This section is perhaps the most critical part of the guide because it encourages what we call "Active Learning". To truly apply the techniques and concepts introduced in this guide in real-life situations, it's vital for you to not just read and memorise them as abstract theory. Instead, you should understand, reflect upon, take ownership of, and practise these concepts. This is where "Active Learning" proves crucial, since it is "the process of having (learners) engage in some activity that forces them to reflect upon ideas and how they are using those ideas"[32]. In this scope, practical exercises such as real-life scenarios and role-playing games were chosen and are presented in this section for you to explore.

These exercises are meant to be interactive and can be used in various ways and settings. You can use them individually for self-paced practice, or you can incorporate them into group activities where all members actively participate and share their feedback, fostering peer-to-peer learning.

Real-life scenarios and how to apply Empathic Active Listening techniques.

How do case studies/real-life scenarios work?

Case studies are a useful tool for teaching effective communication. They involve real-life stories that engage learners actively. By examining real situations and considering different viewpoints, learners improve their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Specifically, when these case studies deal with complex situations in family-school-community relations, they can help parents, teachers, professionals, and community members practise difficult communication processes in a safe environment[33].

Below, you'll find the case study suggested by this guide for practising Empathic Active Listening in a situation of cyberbullying, along with instructions for working with this activity, either on an individual level or as a group of learners.

The Case Study in action

Step 1 - Presentation of Case Study: The activity starts by studying carefully the following case study:

A. is a 12-year-old girl living with her family in a major European city. Her family consists of four members: her father, G., her mother, M., her sister, B., and herself, A. They are a very close-knit family filled with love and understanding.

Both of A.'s parents work; her father as an automobile engineer, and her mother as a saleswoman in a clothing store. Most days, they come home exhausted, as their jobs demand not only long working hours but also a lot of energy.

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[32] Michael, 2006
[33] Harvard Family Research Project, 2014

B., A.'s sister is 15 years old and she is in the 10th grade. She is very sociable and enjoys spending time with friends she has made at school. While she loves her younger sister, she finds it increasingly challenging to spend as much time with her as she would like to. Between schoolwork and hanging out with her peers, she has limited free time.

A. is now in the 6th grade of elementary school and will be going to high school next year. For the past two years, she had a strong desire—to have her own mobile phone. Almost all her classmates already had one, and at times, they teased her for not having her own. They discussed the games they played, took funny photos with various filters (even dog ears!), and even had a group chat. A. really wanted to have her own mobile phone, especially to join that group chat. She felt it would also put an end to the teasing.

After many discussions with her parents, A. managed to convince them to get her a mobile phone. Of course, A. agreed with her parents that she would use it responsibly, dedicate specific time to play with it, and not neglect her other responsibilities. They also agreed that she wouldn't create social media accounts without first consulting with them. A. was primarily interested in participating in the group chat with her classmates. If she succeeded, they would stop teasing her.

Once she got her mobile phone, she joined the chat group. Some classmates welcomed her with enthusiasm ("Finally!", "Hi, A., now you're part of this too"), while others didn't receive her as warmly ("What's she doing here?"). A. was saddened by these comments but chose not to respond.

Days passed, and A. learned to use her new gift better and better. She logged into the group chat every day, and sometimes she even sent messages. However, whenever she did, F., K., and L. would make comments. They called her "stupid" for what she wrote, told her to "get lost" and stop saying "nonsense", and they even laughed at her. As time went on, these messages became more frequent and intense.

Although A. tried not to let it affect her, in reality, this situation was causing her a lot of distress. She couldn't understand why her classmates were talking to her like this, couldn't imagine what she had done wrong. She felt bad and had mixed emotions.

Gradually, her mood started to change. Often, she felt sad and didn't want to go to school. Sometimes, she asked her parents not to send her, saying she had a stomachache or a headache. You could also see a change in A.'s school performance. While she was generally a very good student, lately, she was not particularly diligent. These changes in A.'s mood and behaviour didn't go unnoticed by her mother. She also noticed that her daughter was spending more time on her mobile phone than they had initially agreed upon. One day, she decided to limit her daughter's screen time by taking away her phone for a few hours. During this time, A.'s phone kept vibrating with notifications, so her mother decided to take a look at the group chat. When Mrs. M. saw the messages that A. had been receiving all this time, she panicked. Among these messages were insults, disrespectful comments, and even altered photos. She knew she had to do something about it.

Step 2 - Take a Quiz: After studying the given case, try to engage with the following quiz by expressing your opinions. This quiz aims to help you identify the problem presented in the case study, familiarise yourself with the theoretical framework, as well as assess your existing knowledge of the topic. Here are the questions of the Quiz, followed by their referenced answers:

Questions

Q1: If you could describe in a single word what is happening in the case you just studied, what word would you choose?

Q2: Do you consider cyberbullying to be more, less, or equally dangerous as "traditional", "offline" bullying?

Q3: Do you think gender plays a role in cyberbullying?

Q4: What ages do you think tend to experience cyberbullying?

Q5: What percentage of young people, globally, do you believe have faced cyberbullying?

Answers

A1: Cyberbullying

A2: Both "traditional" and cyberbullying are highly dangerous. However, cyberbullying, as a "new" form, has some unique characteristics that make it even more traumatic and intense. These characteristics include:

- *Rumours and comments can spread rapidly*
- *The identity of the cyberbully remains hidden, allowing them to write whatever they want*
- *Electronic traces are hard to trace without specialised knowledge*
- *Victims of cyberbullying have less control since there are no physical boundaries like a schoolyard[34]*

A3: Clear findings regarding gender differences are not observed, unlike in traditional bullying[35].

A4: Cyberbullying tends to decrease during middle and late childhood and increase again during adolescence[36].

A5: Globally, more than one-third of young people report being victims of online bullying[37].

Step 3 - Reflection / Discussion: This step has two main objectives. Firstly, to explore and comprehend the child's emotions based on the situation described in the case study. Secondly, to examine alternative approaches for the adult to manage the situation. Here are some suggested points to reflect upon (in case of individual learners) or to discuss (in case of group learning), along with their corresponding answers, where applicable.

There are two important points to consider here. First, the points suggested below are appropriate for guiding discussions and reflections among parents/guardians, teachers, and professionals alike. Second, it's worth noting that most of these topics don't come with "correct" answers. This is

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[34] Sygkollitou, Psalti and Kapatzia, 2010; Hinduja and Patchin, 2008; Vandebosch and Van Cleemput, 2009; Dooley, Pyżalski and Cross, 2009

[35] Tzani-Pepelasi et. al, 2020

[36] Tian, Huang & Huebner, 2022

[37] *UNICEF, 2019*

because our objective at this stage isn't about cognitive learning but rather fostering reflection. However, there are a few specific points supported by existing literature that are included to help learners gain a clearer understanding of the subject being discussed or reflected upon, enabling them to participate in the discussion or reflection more confidently.

Questions
- *Q1: What is cyberbullying?*
- *Q2: What are the forms through which cyberbullying manifests?*
- *Q3: What are the forms of cyberbullying identified in our example?*
- *Q4: Is it difficult for a child who is experiencing bullying, specifically like A. in our example, to speak up? If yes, why?*
- *Q5: What emotions can they feel?*
- *Q6: What would you do if you were in M.'s position?*
- *Q7: What would you do if you were A.'s teacher and were informed about the situation she is facing?*
- *Q8: What would you do if you were a professional working in the field of prevention and were informed about this specific incident?*

Answers
- *A1: Cyberbullying refers to the repeated and prolonged use of digital communication methods to intentionally target and harm another individual who is unable to defend themselves[38].*
- *A2: Types of cyberbullying include sending offensive messages, emails, or direct messages with malicious content; maliciously sharing photos or messages to harass others; spreading rumours and false information; making anonymous calls and messages; creating websites with defamatory material and sharing photos; and exclusion from groups. Unique characteristics of cyberbullying include the rapid spread of rumours and comments, the anonymity of the harasser, the difficulty in tracing electronic traces without specialised knowledge, and the lack of control for the victim, as cyberbullying isn't limited to a specific location or time period (unlike, for example, in-school bullying)[39].*
- *A5: Fear, guilt, anger, shame, sadness, anxiety, remorse, worry, stress[40]*

Step 4 - Practical Tips: Following the reflection and discussion, the exercise concludes by offering practical advice customised for each group, directly related to cyberbullying and in line with the principles of Empathic Active Listening:

Tips <u>for all groups of adults:</u>
- *Skills of a "good listener": We actively listen, avoid criticism, steer clear of labels, encourage emotional expression, and create an atmosphere of acceptance and empathy[41].*
- *If a child shares a bullying story with you, focus on their needs.*

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[38] Smith, et. al. 2008
[39] Smith, Del Barrio & Tokunaga, 2012
[40] Gualdo et al., 2015
[41] Elsaesser et al., 2017

- *If there are suspicions of bullying incidents, discuss them openly and take necessary steps to create a safe environment.*
- *Set clear rules and establish definite boundaries. Clarify which behaviours are acceptable and which are not[42].*
- *Observe any changes in the child's mood and behaviour. Signs that should concern us include:*
    - *Frequent complaints of headaches, stomachaches, or general discomfort.*
    - *Appearing sad, anxious, irritable, or angry.*
    - *Sleep difficulties and/or nightmares.*
    - *Avoiding social interactions (visiting friends, conversations).*
    - *Fear of going to school or participating in school activities.*
    - *Unusual behaviour.*
    - *Inconsistency in meeting responsibilities.*
    - *Difficulty speaking in class and appearing anxious and insecure.*
    - *Sudden or gradual decline in their performance[43].*
- *The concept of secrecy: "There should be no secret that can make me feel ashamed, scared, and unable to sleep at night. There should be no secrets from parents and educators"[44]*
- *Parent-teacher collaboration: Frequent communication and mutual updates between parents and educators about the child's needs and progress (parent groups, parent-teacher meetings, informational events, etc.) are highly suggested.*
- *Adults should lead by example themselves[45].*
- *Useful tips to share with children: What to do in the case of threatening, bullying, or uncomfortable messages?*
    - *Don't respond.*
    - *Take a screenshot or copy and save anything that bothers you.*
    - *Block senders of threatening or abusive messages and save the messages.*
    - *Talk to a trusted adult[46].*

Specific tips for parents:
- *Handle the information you receive calmly: It's highly likely that the information you hear will evoke strong emotions, such as sadness, anger, or guilt. However, it's equally important to try and manage these emotions in order to facilitate communication with your child.*
- *Listen to your child with encouragement: Apply the principles of Empathic Active Listening. Listen actively and attentively to what your child wants to*

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[42] Herbert and Australian Council For Educational Research, 1997
[43] Vaillancourt, Faris and Mishna, 2016
[44] The Smile of the Child, 2022
[45] Astynomia.gr, 2022
[46] Astynomia.gr, 2022

share with you. Encourage your child to speak up and commend their courage in discussing what's happening to them.
- *Try to gather as much information as possible: Strive to gather as much information as you can about what has occurred, without pressuring your child. At this point, you can ask specific follow-up questions to better understand their perspective.*
- *Ask your child to show you conversations and messages on their device.*
- *Discuss acceptable behaviours with your child and set boundaries for reactions: Have a detailed conversation with your child about what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Discuss which behaviours are within their rights to address towards others and which are not. The process of setting boundaries for a child's reactions is not an easy task and requires confidence, patience, persistence, and consistency.*
- *Talk about empathy, ethics, respect, and diversity, emphasising that these principles exist in both the real and virtual worlds: Discussing these concepts helps children become familiar with them. Empathy, ethics, and respect are principles that exist in both the real and virtual dimensions. People behind screens are just as real as those we encounter face-to-face.*
- *Contact the Cyber Crime Helpline available in your country immediately.*
- *Contact a reliable Child Protection Helpline available in your country, for guidance and advice[47].*

Specific tips <u>for educators/professionals working with children:</u>
- *Initiate a discussion about the behaviour that concerns you. Engage with all involved parties.*
- *Determine whether it is indeed a case of "bullying": Is it bullying, a disagreement, teasing, or a jest?*
- *Recognise the range of behaviours that may be considered bullying.*
- *Try to gather as much information as possible from different sources (observers, the child being bullied, the child engaging in bullying).*
- *Use open-ended questions to encourage critical thinking and open, honest expression.*
- *Take a clear stance on such incidents. Inform about consequences and remain consistent.*
- *Support your students according to their needs (preventive interventions, supervision, advocacy).*
- *Cultivate your relationship with students and foster meaningful connections among them and with parents/guardians.*
- *Build a trust-based relationship with your students and communicate your availability.*
- *Dedicate time to better understand each student. Each child's story is unique and a valuable source of information.*

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[47] ibid

- *Create a supportive environment in the classroom and throughout the school premises.*

Role-playing games as a tool for practising Empathic Active Listening

How does this role-playing game work?

The role-playing game is centered around a story that portrays a situation of Internet Addiction involving a child. Within this narrative, there are written guidelines for roles representing different perspectives related to this situation: the child, the child's parents or guardians, the child's teacher, and a professional who works with children and interacts with the child.

The objective of the game is for participants to take on the roles of these various stakeholders and engage in a simulated interaction with each other while assuming the identity of the assigned role. This allows them to practise using different communication techniques and develop empathy for the viewpoint of the person they are portraying, even if that person's opinions don't necessarily align with their own real-life perspective.

Below, you'll find the role guidelines for the role-playing game outlined in this guide, along with instructions for participating in the game. It's important to note that role-playing games are typically designed for group play, and the example we're discussing in this section is no exception. However, even if you're reading this on your own, you can still benefit from exploring the scenarios and stories presented in this role-playing game. By becoming acquainted with the diverse perspectives of the characters in the story, you can enhance your empathy, gain a better understanding of different generations, and improve your ability to engage in discussions about topics related to the given scenario, whether directly or indirectly. If you're engaging in the role-playing game with a group, here are the steps to ensure a successful experience:

The Game in action

Step 1 - Distributing Roles: The game starts by randomly distributing role guidelines to participants within each group. Each group receives two distinct role guidelines: one portraying the perspective of the child in the central narrative and the other depicting the viewpoint of an adult involved in the story.

It's important to note that this game is intended for various groups of adult learners, including parents/guardians, teachers, and professionals working with children. Below, you'll find role guidelines for all these groups, but each group is expected to select a unique combination of role guidelines:

- ○ Parents' Group: Each participant receives one of two available role guidelines—one focusing on the child's perspective and the other on the parent/guardian's viewpoint.
- ○ Teachers' Group: Each participant is given one of two available role guidelines—one centred on the child's perspective and the other on the teacher's viewpoint.

- ○ <u>Professionals' Group</u>: Each participant receives one of two available role guidelines—one related to the child's perspective and the other regarding a professional's interaction with children.

Here is the total of the role guidelines for the role-playing game recommended in this guide:

Child's role guideline ("P."):

Hey, I'm P., and I'm in the 6th grade. I live in the town of K with my parents. It's not too big or too small, just kind of in the middle. But, no cap*, there's not much to do here.

Every day feels like a repeat. I wake up in the morning, not really feeling it, and get ready for school. School can be super boring sometimes. The classes are so dull, and they totally exhaust me. The only bright side is hanging out with my squad*, L. and T. We've been friends since forever.

Back in the day, we used to play loads of soccer, but now we're all about this video game called R. This game is GOAT*! You get to create your own character and do whatever you want. It's like you can do all these epic things! You have to be super smart and strategic to slay* it, and guess what? I think I'm pretty fire* at it! I beat L. and T. a bunch of times, which is why they're scared to play against me. Whenever we meet at school, we talk about our wins, and I've got the most wins for sure! I like to flex* on them about it.

Once school's done, I head back home. My mom keeps bugging me to study and do my homework all the time. She just won't give me a break. All I really want to do is play R. with my bros*. I've even made it to this super hard level. But she never leaves me alone, and it drives me crazy. As soon as I try to play, she's right there nagging me. We end up arguing because she gets on my nerves. Yesterday, as a punishment, she took away my tablet for a whole hour and wouldn't let me play. She kept saying stuff like I'm too obsessed with it. What's her deal, seriously? Am I bothering her just because I'm playing my game? And because I didn't get good grades in Language and Math. Come on, I'm just not into those subjects.

Honestly, it really annoys me when my parents take away my tablet and stop me from playing. I get so salty* that I don't even want to talk to them.
(*All of these words are used in the context of Gen-Z popular vocabulary. You may look up their meanings in the glossary provided at the end of this guide. For your convenience, we also provide their definitions here: Bro/Sis = "friend" or "buddy" / Fire = "cool", "awesome", or "great" / Flex = "showing off to others" / GOAT = "greatest of all time" / No cap = "for real" / Salty = "angry" / Squad = "group of friends" / Slay = "to do something really well")

Parent's role guideline ("K."):

Hello there, I am P.'s mom. The truth is, I'm quite confused right now as we speak. I don't know how to handle P. anymore. I don't know what to do. He's only 12 years old and does whatever he pleases.

His teacher called again. Once again, he hadn't done the homework assignments. I remind him every day. Every single day. He just doesn't listen. He's constantly absorbed in that tablet of his; curse the day we got it for him! When he comes back from school, he doesn't do anything else. It's all day, every day. He barely eats, and we struggle to get him to bed. Naturally, I've tried to see what he's been doing on that tablet for so many hours. It's not like he's exposed to any danger, talking to strangers or anything; he just plays that silly game all day. I still can't figure out what he finds so interesting about it. If we dare to take it away for a bit to have a conversation, he gets furious, saying that he has FoMO*. He gets angry, throws things around, all over the house. And this has been going on for quite some time now.

I talked to his teacher, Mrs. Z., to see how he behaves at school too. Mrs. Z. told me that he doesn't cause much trouble; it's just that he seems to have neglected his responsibilities in the past year. She asked if there was something happening in our family. What could possibly be happening, I wonder? But it's true; he's not doing as well in school anymore.

And at home, things have certainly changed. He's become a different kid compared to before. He never used to get so easily annoyed with us like he does now. We hardly ever used to argue this much in the past! I'm really concerned because he's eating less, as if he's lost his appetite. I'm also worried about how he's neglecting his schoolwork. Next year, he'll be heading to middle school! What will happen? He really needs to have a solid foundation!

We need to find a way to make him listen to us. Both me and his father. We both tell him the same thing. He needs to let go of that gadget!

Teacher's role guideline ("N."):
This year has been a challenging school year. P. has been my student for the past two years. He has always been diligent with his schoolwork, consistently studying. He never came to school unprepared, or without having completed his homework.

However, this year it seems like something has changed. He "forgets" his notebooks at home more and more frequently, and he daydreams during class. It's as if he's bored, as if nothing interests him anymore. Even in his exams, he's not doing as well as before.

I wanted to find out what's happening with him, to talk to him, but I don't know how to approach him. He does have friends, the ones he's always had, and it doesn't seem like the other kids are bothering him. I thought maybe something is going on at home, something with his family.

The other day, I called his mother with the intention of understanding the situation better. I got the impression that his mother, with whom I spoke, got a bit offended. It's as if she went on the defensive. I just wanted to inform her that I'm concerned about P. because his behaviour has clearly changed. Even his mood. He used to actively participate in class, ask questions, have inquiries... but now, nothing!

I need to find a way to talk to him, to approach him to understand what has happened. Such a change can't be random. I don't think it's just my imagination.

Professional's role guideline ("C."):
I'm C., and I work as a psychologist at the X Child Protection Organization. A significant part of my job revolves around providing training and implementing prevention and awareness interventions within the school community, covering various topics.
Recently, I found myself at a school, conducting a prevention intervention with sixth-grade students. Our focus for this session was Internet safety. Most of the children showed genuine interest in the presentation. I always make an effort, whenever possible, to keep my presentations engaging and encourage active participation from the kids.
However, there were two particular students, P. and L., as I later found out, who appeared entirely disinterested in our topic. No matter how close I got to them or how animated my movements, they remained unfazed. They had even initiated their own conversation, from what I could overhear; they were discussing their successes in a game called "R". This gave me a chance to spark their curiosity. I asked them, "Hey, kids, what's this 'R' game you keep mentioning?". They responded that it's a popular video game. While they briefly seemed intrigued, their interest decreased quickly. After approximately five minutes, they resumed their conversation, paying no attention to what I was saying. To be honest, I felt somewhat disheartened. I had put in so much effort, cracked jokes to capture their attention, and yet nothing seemed to engage them.
At the end of the intervention, I inquired with the class teacher about these two students. She informed me that they had been behaving this way for the past year and that it wasn't uncommon. Nevertheless, I couldn't help but wish for an opportunity to have a conversation with them.

Step 2 - Role Study: Participants should thoroughly read their assigned role guidelines. This helps them understand both the central narrative (i.e., the situation affecting the child) and the perspective of the character they are assigned (i.e., what their character believes, thinks, and feels about the situation from their personal viewpoint).

Step 3 - Pairing Up: After familiarising themselves with their roles, participants form pairs to engage in role-playing exercises. In each group, specific pairs are created: children with parents/guardians in the parents/guardians' group, children with teachers in the teachers' group, and children with professionals in the professionals' group.

Step 4 - Start Playing: Each pair assumes their respective roles, delving into the emotions, personal stories, and challenges faced by their assigned characters. They engage in a dialogue with their partner, aiming to express their character's experiences, including emotions, concerns, and problems they must address. This stage, the core of the game, encourages active listening and communication, applying principles and practices of Empathic Active Listening.

Step 5 - Group Discussion: Following the dialogue in pairs, each pair shares their experiences with the rest of the group. At this stage, the pairs are invited to discuss the experience they had while taking on some of the roles mentioned above, even if only

briefly.

The discussion is divided into two parts, starting with a broad approach and then delving into specifics. The first part focuses on emotions, feelings, and the effectiveness of communication (was it successful? Did it foster a stronger connection and better mutual understanding?). This initial part is considered general because it offers insights into how Empathic Active Listening can enhance communication in various contexts, regardless of the topic. The second part shifts the discussion towards specific aspects related to the exercise's subject matter. Its aim is to provide a deeper understanding of the cognitive aspects by offering essential definitions related to Internet Addiction.

Here are some points for the first part of the discussion (in case you are studying this guide on an individual level, you may use these points as points for reflection):

- *What emotions do you believe the characters you portrayed might be feeling?*
- *What emotions do you think the character represented by your partner may have experienced?*
- *Do you think your communication with your partner went smoothly, or did you encounter any difficulties?*
- *Is there something that could have been improved? Why or why not?*
- *Are there any aspects that you believe might not go as smoothly in real life? Why or why not?*

After completing the first part of the discussion on how to achieve improved communication with their conversation partner and reviewing the techniques of Empathic Active Listening as outlined in the theoretical section of the guide, the participants can move on to the second part of the discussion. This part delves into the specific situation faced by the main character, "P.". Here are suggested discussion points for this second part, along with their corresponding answers, where applicable:

Questions
- *Q1: Do you think our hero, "P.", is facing any difficulties? If so, what are they?*
- *Q2: What risks do you think a child may encounter online?*
- *Q3: What do you know about the term "Internet Addiction Disorder"?*
- *Q4: What do you know about the term "Internet Gaming Disorder"?*
- *Q5: In what case can we say that there is a risk of Internet Gaming Disorder?*
- *Q6: Do you believe there is any relationship between violent video games/online games and violent behaviour in real life?*
- *Q7: Can video games have benefits?*
- *Q8: In what ways do you think adults can set boundaries for children's use of electronic devices?*

Answers
- A2:
  - R*isks related to content (offensive, violent, hateful, misinformative or fake content)*

- ○ *Risks related to communication (cyberbullying, grooming, phishing, sexting, sextortion, and negative interactions)*
- *A3: Internet Addiction Disorder is characterised by compulsive and problematic internet use that can negatively affect cognitive functions, social skills, sleep, and other aspects of one's life. Although not officially recognised as a disorder, previous studies have identified subtypes such as Internet Gaming Disorder, cybersex addiction, and Internet gambling disorder. Specific types of internet addiction include addictive cybersex, cyber addiction in relationships, addiction to online gaming, addictive web use or information overload, and computer addiction[48].*
- *A4: Internet Gaming Disorder was included in the appendix of the DSM-5 by the American Psychiatric Association. The DSM-5 presents diagnostic criteria, including preoccupation with gaming, experiencing negative symptoms when gaming is restricted, tolerance, unsuccessful control attempts, loss of interest in other activities, continued excessive use despite problems, deception, using games to escape negative moods, and jeopardising relationships or opportunities due to gaming[49].*
- *A5: To diagnose this condition, an individual must display five or more of the symptoms mentioned above consistently for a minimum of one year. This disorder applies to electronic gaming, whether on the Internet or any other electronic device, although the majority of those with clinically significant issues predominantly engage in online gaming. Electronic gaming should result in "significant harm or distress" across various aspects of an individual's life. Nevertheless, the DSM-5 clarifies that there isn't enough data available to conclusively determine whether Internet Gaming Disorder qualifies as an independent disorder or if it tends to co-occur with other conditions (e.g., depression, impulse control disorders, etc.)[50].*
- *A6: So far, there isn't a definitive answer regarding the link between violent video games and aggressive behaviour in children. This lack of clarity is understandable because establishing such a connection requires considering numerous intermediary factors (such as the child's age, family dynamics, and temperament). Some studies[51] support the idea that there is no association between the two, and that participating in violent video games doesn't predict increased aggression.*
  - *However, an increasing body of research and meta-analyses[52] suggests that high levels of engagement in violent video games are indeed positively correlated with an eventual increase in physical aggression. This correlation appears to be driven primarily by two mechanisms:*
    - *Desensitisation to violence and development of familiarity with it*
    - *Ethical disengagement from the impact of actions that take place in a game*
- *A7:*
  - ○ *Improve spatial perception and cognitive functions[53]*

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[48] D Griffiths, 2014
[49] American Psychiatric Association, 2013
[50] Ibid.
[51] *Ferguson & Wang, 2019*
[52] *Prescott, Sargent & Hull, 2018*
[53] Choi et al., 2020

- ○ *Enhance attention and phonological encoding* in children with dyslexia[54]*
- ○ *Aid in learning executive functions and decision-making[55]*
- ○ *Specifically, some "educational games" even support psychotherapy, especially in phobia-related matters, through the use of virtual and augmented reality (VR, AR)[56]*
- ○ *However, the benefits that electronic games bring to an individual also depend on the type of game in question[57]*
- *A8 <u>for Parents:</u>*
  - ○ *Be determined to set limits.*
  - ○ *Be decisive and confident in your approach (tone of voice, body language), but also remain calm and tender.*
  - ○ *Avoid feeling guilty.*
  - ○ *Understand that your child may resist.*
  - ○ *Expect that your child will test the boundaries.*
  - ○ *Don't expect immediate compliance with the rules.*
  - ○ *Both parents should follow the same rules.*
  - ○ *Set boundaries based on the child's age and personality.*
  - ○ *Avoid long gaps between unwanted behavior and consequences.*
  - ○ *Focus your criticism on the behavior, not the child as an individual.*
  - ○ *Remember: Overly rigid boundaries can make a child passive.*
  - ○ *Provide alternatives for your child to release their energy, such as playing ball indoors or suggesting outdoor play.*
  - ○ *Offer positive behaviour models for your child to imitate.*
  - ○ *Remember to positively reinforce your child[58].*
  - ○ *And some more practical advice for parents:*
    - *Spend time online with your children to teach them appropriate internet behaviour[59].*
    - *Check your credit card and phone accounts for unfamiliar charges.*
    - *Take time to sit with your child to watch him play, encourage, ask questions of interest*
    - *Find out which websites and devices your child is using to access the internet[60].*
    - *Take your child seriously if they report an uncomfortable online interaction.*
    - *Monitor whether the games, websites, and videos your child accesses online are age-appropriate[61].*

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[54] Bertoni et al., 2021
[55] Mayer, Parong & Bainbridge, 2019
[56] Zayeni, Reynaud & Revet, 2020
[57] Bediou et al., 2018
[58] The Smile of the Child, n.d.
[59] Astynomia.gr, 2022
[60] ibid
[61] ibid

- *Implement privacy settings and parental control programs, and use apps designed specifically for children, such as YouTube Kids[62]*
- *A8 for Teachers/Professionals:*
  - *Encourage open communication, closeness, and a trusting relationship between the child and their parent/guardian*
  - *Teach the child that their actions affect both themselves and others and have consequences.*
  - *Emphasise consistency and repetition when setting boundaries.*
  - *Promote positive discipline (rather than authoritarian or permissive approaches).*
  - *Reward the child when they follow the rules and accept the boundaries.*
  - *Expect extreme reactions from the child (crying, yelling, anger, aggression) when boundaries are enforced.*
  - *In general, it is recommended to:*
    - *Maintain open and honest dialogues with children.*
    - *Emphasise supervision of children's online activities.*
    - *Focus on actively protecting children's online identities[63].*
    - *Educate children about the benefits and risks of the internet[64].*
    - *Stress the importance of safeguarding children's personal data[65].*

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[62] Raising Children Network. (n.d.)
[63] Astynomia.gr, 2022
[64] ibid
[65] ibid

Conclusion

The primary goal of this guide was to emphasise the profound importance of the Empathic Active Listening methodology in nurturing trust-based relationships between adults and children in an increasingly digital world. Throughout the guide, we delved into the core principles related to Empathic Active Listening, explored the attitudes that formed the foundation for the methodology to thrive, including genuineness, empathy, and unconditional positive regard. We also discussed specific techniques that could help put this methodology into action, such as the LAFF technique. We explored these concepts not only in theory but also through hands-on practice with case studies and role-playing games, which aimed at helping readers practise this new form of communication in a safe environment.

Furthermore, we suggested that the power of Empathic Active Listening extends well beyond the specific context of internet safety and risks. The principles, attitudes, and techniques associated with Empathic Active Listening are essential assets for nurturing healthy adult-child relationships in various life situations, whether readers are parents, educators, or child-focused professionals. We discovered that Empathic Active Listening is more than just a methodology; it is a transformative way to deeply connect with children. It is about creating a secure and nurturing space where their thoughts and feelings are valued, ultimately enriching their well-being and strengthening the bonds they share with adults.

Therefore, the overall goal of this guide was to serve adult readers as a valuable resource on their journey to becoming more empathetic and effective communicators, with the promise of enhancing their relationships with children in all aspects of life.

Glossary

A

Active Listening/Empathic Active Listening: Active Listening/Empathic Active Listening involves a set of verbal and non-verbal skills that are crucial for effective interpersonal communication. Some well-known active listening practices and techniques include a) providing empathetic annotations, b) asking productive questions, and c) paraphrasing the speaker's comments to show attention and confirm understanding.

B

Bro/Sis: Used in the context of Gen-Z popular vocabulary. It means "friend" or "buddy".

C

Communication: Communication is the process of transmitting information and achieving shared understanding between individuals.

Cyberbullying: Cyberbullying refers to the repetitive and prolonged use of digital communication methods to deliberately target and harm another individual who is unable to defend themselves. Types of cyberbullying include sending offensive messages, emails, or direct messages with malicious content; maliciously sharing photos or messages to harass others; spreading rumours and false information; making anonymous calls and messages; creating websites with defamatory material and sharing photos; and exclusion from groups. Special characteristics of cyberbullying include the rapid spread of rumours and comments, the anonymity of the harasser, the difficulty in tracing electronic traces without specialised knowledge, and the lack of control for the victim, as cyberbullying isn't limited to a specific location or time period (unlike, for example, in-school bullying).

E

Empathy: Empathy is the ability to understand another person's experiences from their perspective. In simpler terms, it's the capacity to "put oneself in another's shoes."

F

FoMO (Fear of Missing Out) Syndrome: Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) Syndrome is the feeling of tension, anxiety, and emptiness that arises when an individual is deprived of staying updated on other people's lives, events, and situations outside of their own life, due to a desire to be constantly informed.

Fire: Used in the context of Gen-Z popular vocabulary. It means "cool", "awesome", or "great".

Flex: Used in the context of Gen-Z popular vocabulary. It means "showing off to others".

G

GOAT: Used in the context of Gen-Z popular vocabulary. It means "greatest of all time".

Grooming: Grooming is a subset of cybersexploitation, which may or may not involve explicit conversations of a sexual nature, or indeed online enactment of fantasies but still falls under the umbrella of cybersexploitation because the intention is to sexually abuse a child in the real world, but one of the points of contact occurs in cyberspace. Grooming, which has been defined

in the proposed "anti-grooming legislation" announced in the November 2022. Protecting the Public White Paper refers to the following: "A course of conduct enacted by a suspected paedophile, which would give a reasonable person cause for concern that any meeting with a child arising from the conduct would be for unlawful purposes"[66]

I

Internet Addiction Disorder: Internet Addiction Disorder is characterised by compulsive and problematic internet use that can negatively affect cognitive functions, social skills, sleep, and other aspects of one's life. Although not officially recognised as a disorder, previous studies have identified subtypes such as Internet Gaming Disorder, cybersex addiction, and Internet gambling disorder. Specific types of internet addiction include addictive cybersex, cyber addiction in relationships, addiction to online gaming, addictive web use or information overload, and computer addiction.

Internet Gaming Disorder: Internet Gaming Disorder was included in the appendix of the DSM-5 by the American Psychiatric Association. The DSM-5 presents diagnostic criteria, including preoccupation with gaming, experiencing negative symptoms when gaming is restricted, tolerance, unsuccessful control attempts, loss of interest in other activities, continued excessive use despite problems, deception, using games to escape negative moods, and jeopardising relationships or opportunities due to gaming.

Internet Risks: Children using the internet might encounter risks related to the content they see, the communication they engage in, and their online behaviour, including exposure to inappropriate content, cyberbullying, grooming, phishing, sexting, sextortion, and negative interactions.

N

No cap: Used in the context of Gen-Z popular vocabulary. It means "for real".

Non-verbal Communication: Non-verbal communication encompasses all forms of communication other than words, including body language, gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice.

P

Phishing: is a network type attack where the attacker creates the fake of an existing webpage to fool an online user into elicit personal information. Phishing is the combination of social engineering and technical methods to convince the user to reveal their personal data. Phishing is typically carried out by Email spoofing or instant messaging. It targets the user who has no knowledge about social engineering attacks, and internet security like persons who do not take care of privacy of their accounts details (such as Facebook, Gmail, credit banks accounts and other financial accounts)[67]

S

Salty: Used in the context of Gen-Z popular vocabulary. It means "angry".

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[66] O'Connell, 2003
[67] Gupta, Singhal and Kapoor, 2016

Sexting: Sexting is the sending and receiving of sexually explicit text messages or media (photos, videos, audio messages). The images are often initially sent to romantic partners or interests but can find their way into hands of others, which ultimately is what creates the problems. While the public is most concerned about these behaviours as they occur among adolescents, there is evidence that many adults are participating as well[68].

Sextortion: Sextortion involves a request - whether explicit or implicit- to engage in sexual activity. It need not involve sexual intercourse or even physical touching, but could be any form of unwanted sexual activity, such as exposing private body parts or posing for sexual photographs[69].

Squad: Used in the context of Gen-Z popular vocabulary. It means "group of friends".

Slay: Used in the context of Gen-Z popular vocabulary. It means "to do something really well".

V

Verbal Communication: Verbal Communication is the aspect of communication expressed through spoken or written words.

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[68] Hinduja and Patchin, 2010
[69] Bernstein, 2010

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