

## Empathy Interview Directions

### Notes on Confidentiality and Anonymity

While conducting empathy interviews we will hear personal things from members of our community. It is essential that we keep their specific identities anonymous. To do this, we ask you to do three things as you take notes.

- 1) Create a description you will use in place of their name. This could be factual such as “Laid off Elementary Parent”, or “Homeschooling Three Grandchildren”. You may also give them a respectful and descriptive pseudonyms such as “Frustrated Phil”, or “Earnest Emily”, or “Overwhelmed Olive”
- 2) But please do make note of any relevant aspects of their background that they share with you over the course of their interview, including race, age range, the way they are participating in schooling taking care not to identify specifics such as their children’s names, the names of teachers or peers or family members they may refer to, their homeroom or even grade level (say K-2 or 3 or middle school or high school instead).
- 3) Please be careful not to say which city they live in or other details that would make it possible for someone to deduce their identity.

Here is an example describing Gretchen from our team:

<u>Specific Description</u>	<u>Anonymized Description</u>
Gretchen is a white middle class mother of Henry (15) and Sylvie (12). They live in Denver and her students attend STEM School. She also works in education for the Center for Innovation in Education. Her husband teaches CAD programs at Community College of Denver and is a former high school teacher. They are both still working full time and share the work of supporting their children with remote learning.	Busy Betsy is a white middle class mother of one middle and one high school student. They live in a city. Her students attend a school with strong existing use of technology. Busy Betsy has also been a teacher and school leader in her career. She still works in the field of education. Her husband is a teacher. They are both working while supporting their children with remote learning

### Who should I interview?

This form is designed to support team members in conducting empathy interviews with a range of stakeholders, from different places, working in different schools, of different ages, of different backgrounds, with different family circumstances, working with different groups of families, etc. Try to get a little beyond your circle of familiar folks as you identify which people to interview.

### How should I start the interview?

Introduce yourself and why you are talking to them. Consider this script:

Introduce yourself

Introduce the project:

*We represent the \_\_\_ [school or district]. I am a \_\_\_ at the [school/district].*

*We are talking with families and educators from across the community to learn about how they experienced school and learning last spring and so far this fall. We hope to understand what you need for a successful year.*

Name that this information will be kept confidential so they can feel like they can be completely candid. AND name that we are compiling this info to surface trends.

Shift focus to interviewee (ask name, where they come from). Build rapport and connection.

### What questions should I ask and how do I take notes?

Use the [table below](#) to choose questions. There are three basic categories: starter questions, topic questions, and closing questions. You will likely choose 1 starter, 1-2 topic, and 1 closing question, but follow your instincts and what you hear from the interviewee.

Remember to zoom into stories, ask about emotions and reactions, and inquire into inconsistencies.

Take as close to literal notes as possible in the right side of the table. It is generally easier to gather insights from quotes than general take-aways. Also, everyone will want quotes to contribute to user profiles later in the process.

Remember to review the [Empathy Card](#) at the bottom of this form for further tips and approaches.

### What do I do after I finish the interview?

Replace where it says: [my name] ND Community Design Empathy Interview Form, with your name. If you do more than 1 interview, put a different number after your last name for each form.

Either share the google doc with, or save and send the word file with your notes to:  
[doannie@leadingwithlearning.org](mailto:doannie@leadingwithlearning.org)

## Empathy Interview Note Taking Form

Interviewer Name:

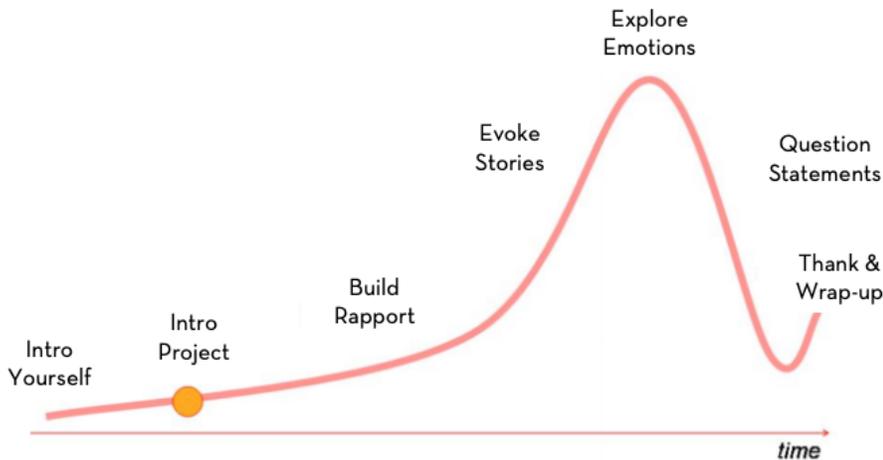
Anonymized Interviewee Description: (You may find it is easier to write this description after the interview)

Possible questions - Only choose 1 per section. You probably won't get to them all.		Notes
Starter Questions	What are your hopes for you and your learners this year?  In the future, if the relationships between families and schools were wildly successful - what would that look like?	
If talking to a caregiver  (remember, just choose 1 to start with and see where it goes!)	Can you tell me about your student's best day of this year? How about your student's most difficult day?  Can you tell me about <b>your</b> best day supporting learning at home? How about your worst day?	

	<p>Can you tell me about a time when you felt engaged by your child's teacher?</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you and your child didn't feel real engagement with a teacher or other person at school?</p> <p>When was the last time school really felt like a place that knew you as a whole person? Knew your student as a whole person?</p>	
<p>If talking to an educator</p>	<p>Can you tell me about any one student's happiest day of learning last spring? How about any one of your student's most difficult days?</p> <p>Can you tell me about <b>your</b> best day supporting distance learning? How about your worst day?</p> <p>Tell me about the most recent time you felt like you had a strong partnership with a learner's family... How did that come about?</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you struggled to build an effective partnership with a family? How did that come about...</p>	
<p>If talking to a student</p>	<p>When was the last time school really felt like a place that understood you and what was important to you?</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you felt really supported to improve. What helped? What didn't?</p> <p>Can you describe a time when you were really struggling with something at school, but then you were finally able to be successful? How did you get through it?</p> <p>How about a time when you had a challenge that didn't work out so well?</p>	
<p>Identifying your needs</p>	<p>If your school were wildly successful this fall, what would that look like?</p> <p>What do you need to have a really successful year, next year?</p> <p>If you were at the district office or department of education, what would you do to be most helpful to learners, families, teachers?</p> <p>Tell me about a concern you have about school this year.</p>	

# METHOD

## INTERVIEW FOR EMPATHY



### WHY interview

You want to understand a person's thoughts, emotions, and motivations, so that you can determine how to innovate for him or her. By understanding the choices that person makes and the behaviors that person engages in, you can identify their needs, and design to meet those needs.

### HOW to interview

**Ask why.** Even when you think you know the answer, ask people why they do or say things. The answers will sometimes surprise you. A conversation started from one question should go on as long as it needs to.

**Never say "usually" when asking a question.** Instead, ask about a specific instance or occurrence, such as "tell me about the last time you \_\_\_"

**Encourage stories.** Whether or not the stories people tell are true, they reveal how they think about the world. Ask questions that get people telling stories.

**Look for inconsistencies.** Sometimes what people say and what they do are different. These inconsistencies often hide interesting insights.

**Pay attention to nonverbal cues.** Be aware of body language and emotions.

**Don't be afraid of silence.** Interviewers often feel the need to ask another question when there is a pause. If you allow for silence, a person can reflect on what they've just said and may reveal something deeper.

**Don't suggest answers to your questions.** Even if they pause before answering, don't help them by suggesting an answer. This can unintentionally get people to say things that agree with your expectations.

**Ask questions neutrally.** "What do you think about buying gifts for your spouse?" is a better question than "Don't you think shopping is great?" because the first question doesn't imply that there is a right answer.

**Don't ask binary questions.** Binary questions can be answered in a word; you want to host a conversation built upon stories.

**Make sure you're prepared to capture.** Always interview in pairs. If this is not possible, you should use a voice recorder—it is impossible to properly engage a user and take detailed notes at the same time.