

Reflective Listening

Reflective listening is also called empathic listening. It is a way to respectfully attend to what is going on emotionally in another person. Like a mirror reflects the image it sees, you, as a reflective listener, mirror back what you hear someone else saying. Defenses, excuses, and differing opinions are withheld until your partner feels completely understood, and you, the reflector, feels as though you fully understand.



REFLECTIVE LISTENING INCLUDES BOTH AN ATTITUDE AND A SKILL

ATTITUDE

- A willingness to temporarily set aside your own perceptions, thoughts, and feelings.
- An attempt to understand the perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of someone else.
- Communicates, "I want to understand your point of view as fully as I can."

SKILL

- Restate the message of your partner in such a way that he/she/they feel understood by you.
- Use the simple formula, "You're feeling _____ because _____."

REFLECTIVE LISTENING RESULTS IN:

- The sender of a message feels safe, heard, and respected.
- The sender more likely is willing to go deeply into his/her/their feelings and inner world.
- The listener gets to fully understand the sender, even if the two don't agree.
- The listener gets to demonstrate his/her/their understanding, helping the sender feel fully heard.
- Creating intimacy, or into-me-see.

Example 1

Sender: She is so loving and affectionate with the children. She really listens to them and takes time to be with them. I don't think I could ever show my affection so openly with the kids.

Receiver: You notice how affectionate and caring she is with the kids, listening to them and taking time to be with them. You recognize that being that affectionate doesn't come as easy for you.

Sender: And in a way I'm almost jealous of her. I guess I see the children going to her in a way I wish they would come to me.

Receiver: You notice the children going to her, and it makes you feel a bit jealous that they don't come to you in the same way.

Example 2

Sender: I'm really angry that you didn't pick up milk on the way home, like I thought we had agreed, because now we have to delay dinner until one of us gets the milk.

Receiver: You're pissed at me because I forgot the milk. And you're angry that we'll have to delay dinner.

Sender: Yeah, I'm real hungry and I've had a lousy day at work and I feel like no one is concerned about helping me out. Everyone expects me to take care of everything.

Receiver: Sounds like you're feeling put upon both at work and at home and you'd like more assistance and concern.



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Reflective Listening Practice



Remember the formula: **You're feeling** _____ **because** _____.

1 - SENDER: I thought I had that job all lined up. I felt like the interview was a breeze and that the boss really liked me. I can't believe they never called me back.

2 - SENDER: I'm so frustrated about my job. I want a job that is more rewarding, but I feel under qualified for what I really want to do. I'd love to go back to school, I but I don't think we could afford that right now.

3 - SENDER: I told the boss that I would have the project ready for him by tomorrow, but there is no way I can put it all together in one night. It's not that I've been lazy. I didn't have all the material until two days ago, and I've been going non-stop on it since then. I'm afraid he'll be disappointed and I'll get the blame.

4 - SENDER: My friend Sue has been calling me every day for the past week. I know she is going through a lot right now, but I'm not feeling very sympathetic anymore. I wish she didn't call so often, but I don't know how to tell her.

5 - SENDER: Your father called and wants to take us out to dinner next week. I really don't feel like being with him for an evening. I can't stand his constant criticism of your ideas. He seems so pessimistic all the time.

6 - SENDER: I really want to get away, just the two of us. We haven't just played together in such a long time. I feel like we're both trying to be successful in our jobs, and I'm afraid of losing touch with each other. I don't want that to happen.

7 - SENDER: I really felt put down by you when you laughed at my new haircut. I wanted to try something new, and I was a bit unsure about it, too. But it really hurt when you just laughed at me.

8 - SENDER: I feel so exhausted when I get home from work. The last thing I feel like doing is cleaning up around here, yet I know it needs to be done. I would really like your help more around the house.

9 - SENDER: You never take the time to listen to me. You seem to listen only so I won't get mad but not because you're really interested in me.

10 - SENDER: I find it hard to tell you this, but I really like it when you do things for me that make me feel special and loved.



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