

Reflective Listening

Reflective listening is also known as parallel talk, parroting, and paraphrasing.

It can be used to:

- check for understanding
- reduce the incidence of emotional words
- create empathy
- build a positive rapport

Ideas for reflection come from listening, observing, and interpreting verbal and nonverbal cues as the listener tries to walk in the shoes of the speaker.

Ideas can be:

- content about what a person says or thinks.
- inferences on a person's feelings.
- a stated or unstated implication about what a person wants.

When you listen reflectively you express your:

- Desire to understand how the person is thinking and feeling.
- Belief in the person's ability to understand the situation, identify solutions, select an appropriate choice, and implement it responsibly.
- Belief the person is worthwhile.
- Respect and/or willingness to accept other people's feelings.
- Desire to help.
- Willingness not to judge the person.
- Desire to share how others perceive what they say or do.
- Desire to explore a problem and help them understand the dimensions of the problem, possible choices and their consequences.

A reflective response lets you communicate to a person what you perceive they are doing, feeling, and saying and why they are choosing their behaviors. It is impossible to be the other person and your best understanding is only a reasonable approximation. Be open-minded and cautious. Consider all ideas as tentative since our best understanding will always be limited because of the uniqueness of all people.

Reflective listening is to open communication.

All of the following responses are detrimental to communication.

Responses that question, praise, criticize, blame, disagree, agree, warn, order, give advise, humor, name-call, shame, moralize, sympathize, reassure, or support.

These responses have the following effects:

- Blame the person.
- Solve the person's problem for the person.
- Allow the person to avoid responsibility to own the feeling about what has been said or done.
- Enable the person to continue the behavior.

To restate what the student states is different than repeating student's answers in class. Dialogues of this nature will be in private, is done to check what is being communicated and for the purpose of understanding the student. Example:

Student: Why do you always pick on me. Others do stuff and you don't yell at them.

Educator: I pick on you and not on the other students. (Said as a statement not a question) or

Educator: I single you out when there is an interruption more than the other students.

Suggestions to use reflective statements to express what you believe students are saying:

- State the problem as the student sees it without emotional words.
- Focus on the issue to promote discussion on the student's feelings and/or circumstances.
- Don't give advice, don't defend yourself, and don't reassure.
- Don't take a defensive position or justify your position.
- Don't make it right for the student.
- Keep the responsibility on the student.

Sample phrases for when you think your perceptions are accurate.

I understand the problem as...

I see the situation as...

I'm sensing...

Could it be that...

I wonder if...

Correct me if I'm wrong. ...

I get the impression that...

Let me see if I understand. You ...

As I hear it. You...

You feel

From your point of view

It seems to you

In your experience

From where you stand

As you see it

You think

You believe

What I hear you saying

I'm picking up that you

I really hear you saying that

Where you're coming from

You figure

You mean

Phrases to use when you have difficulty understanding.

Could it be

I wonder if

I'm not sure if I'm with you, but

Would you buy this idea

What I guess I'm hearing is

Correct me if I'm wrong but

Is it possible that

Does it sound reasonable that you

Could this be what's going on, you

From where I stand you

This is what I think I hear you saying

You appear to be feeling

It appears you

Perhaps you're feeling

I somehow sense that maybe you feel

Is there any chance that you

Maybe you feel

Is it conceivable that

Maybe this is a long shot, but

Maybe I'm out to lunch, but

Do you feel a little

I'm not sure if I'm with you; do you mean

I'm not certain I understand; you're feeling

It seems that you

As I hear it, you

...is that the way it is?

...is that what you mean?

...is that the way you feel?

Let me see if I understand you; you

Let me see if I'm with you; you

I get the impression that

I guess that you're

Thoughts and suggestions for the use of I And You messages

You may have noticed the use of I and you in many of the examples.

There are two kinds of you messages that can be communicated with I and You.

- to blame and
- probe for understanding

A you message to blame is used to hurt and humiliate. Will often increase, rather than decrease, unacceptable behavior. It can cause resentment, escalate conflict and is a roadblock to communication.

- You did that on purpose.
- You are a no good low down dirty rotten egg.

Ginott (1972) asserted you statements can be worded and used effectively to respond to a child's situation, complaint, or request. To help them deal with their feelings and gain strength to cope with life. This kind of you message opens dialogue. The format:

- You feel _____ because _____.
- You're _____ because _____.
- You're _____ at, by, with, about, for _____.

Use you (understand) messages to keep the focus on student feelings and student selected solutions. Use I (understand) messages when students own a problem. Together they create the foundations for what Ginott (1972) referred to as congruent communication.