

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 just 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:

Attitude

- willingness to temporarily set aside your own perceptions, thoughts and feelings
- attempt to understand the perceptions, thoughts and feelings of someone else
- an attitude that says, "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 they feel understood by you
- simple formula is, "You're feeling _____ because _____."

Reflective listening results is:

- The sender of a message feels safe, heard, and respected.
- The sender more likely to be willing to go deeply into their feelings and inner world.
- The listener gets to fully understand the sender, even if they don't agree.
- The listener gets to demonstrate their understanding, helping the sender feel fully heard.
- Creates the possibility of intimacy (into-me-see)

Example I

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, and 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 II

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.