

Reflective Listening

"Listening looks easy, but it's not simple. Every head is a world."

Cuban proverb



It is **NOT** about asking questions or telling what the listener feels, believes, or wants.

Reflective listening is a communication strategy involving two key steps:

1. Seeking to understand a speaker's idea
2. Then offering the idea back to the speaker, to confirm the idea has been understood correctly.



WHAT

It attempts to reconstruct what the client is thinking and feeling and to relay this understanding back to the client.

This includes:

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

HOW

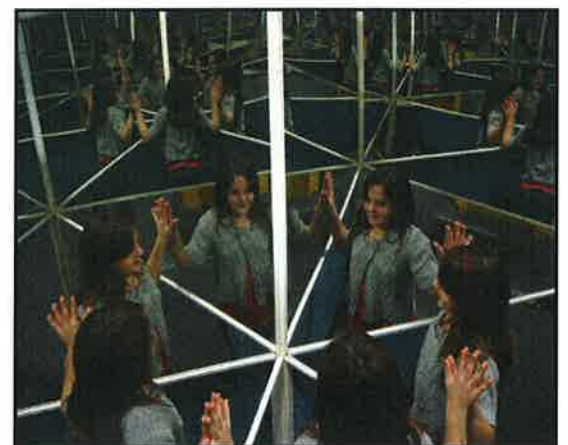
Ideas for reflection come from listening, observing, and interpreting verbal and nonverbal cues. The listener tries to walk in the shoes of the speaker... seeing the world through the speaker's eyes and experiences and speaking from that point of reference. This can happen through:

- Mirroring the mood of the speaker
- Reflecting the emotional state with words
- Summarizing what the speaker said
- Restating and clarifying what the other has said
- Verbalizing the feelings contained in what the other is saying, not just the facts or ideas.

The listener can repeat or substitute synonyms or phrases and stay close to what the speaker has said.

The listener can make major restatements in which the speaker's meaning is inferred.

The listener can emphasize emotional aspects through feeling statements.



Common reflective statement stems:

- "So you feel..."
- "It sounds like you..."
- "You're wondering if..."
- "For you it's like..."

“I’ve been feeling more depressed lately.”

Simple Reflection	Repeating an element of what the speaker has said	<i>“You’ve been more depressed lately”</i>
	Staying close to what the speaker has said with some synonyms	<i>“You are feeling a little more sad about life than usual.”</i>
Complex Reflection	Inferring/guessing at the speaker’s meaning and reflecting it back	<i>“You are struggling right now and want to understand why you keep sliding backwards.”</i>
	Emphasizing the emotional dimension through feeling/	<i>“It’s like a heavy cloud that’s descended on you and taking your energy.”</i>

What can make a reflection complex?

Adding Content (interpretation or feeling)

I’ve been struggling lately.

“There’s a big part of you thinking it’s just not worth it anymore.”

Metaphor or Simile (“picture language”)

The stress seems never-ending.

“You feel like you’re running on the hamster wheel.”

Amplification (stronger or weaker)

I’m not sure I’m up for it.

“This is by far the biggest challenge you’ve ever faced.”

Double-Sided (reflect two side of customer’s viewpoint)

I’m not sure I can quit smoking.

“On one hand it’s a comforting habit, and on the other hand you’re starting to worry about the physical impact it’s taking on you.”

Reframing (put situation in a different light)

I don’t think I could work for minimum wage.

“You’re ready to research what your next steps are for finding a financially rewarding career.”

Verbalization of unspoken emotion

I don’t think she needs to get more education.

“You have some fear that she may end up leaving you.”

Emphasize one side (for particular effect)

I know I have to quit drinking, but I don’t know how my friends would react and I know I would get bored.

“Part of you that knows it’s killing you and that now is the time to take control of it.”