

Reflective Listening concisely expresses the meaning and invites clarification of the speaker's message using mostly fresh or different words, especially to achieve greater clarity, invite correction, and facilitate connection.

FOUR VARIATIONS OF REFLECTIVE LISTENING:

1. **Listen & Recall** (*I'm showing you I got the whole message*): Verbalize back the entire message without omitting any significant parts. The speaker is invited to agree or disagree with your recall by correcting and emphasizing key parts. This is not mimicry, you can still reword parts of the message to bring clarity.
 - a. "I think I'm getting this, but let me know what I'm missing -- you want to forgive your friend but you don't know how to reconcile with them because each time you reconnect the same patterns continue and it's discouraging for you."
 - b. "Okay, so what I'm hearing is -- you want to switch jobs but you're concerned if you leave now you'll be abandoning your co-workers during a stressful time and plus you're nervous about change in general."
2. **Identify the Content** (*What/who/when/where are we talking about?*): Select and highlight a part of the message by asking what event, situation, idea, or person the client is talking about. This is typically useful when a person is crossing over time and places quickly or using pronouns for multiple characters in their story. Be careful how you gather this information -- let your interruption be gentle/soft or consider expressing a quisical/lost/confused emotional affect to que the speaker that you need clarification.
 - a. "Are you referencing-- Jill from work or Jill from the gym?", "Are you saying-- you are not feeling well?", "Which person said-- they 'like coffee'?"
 - b. Pro-tip: Avoid vague wording if possible - use specific nouns/proper-nouns instead of pronouns. "Your boss/Mr.Jackson" instead of "he/she/they". "Your car/the Honda" instead of "it".
3. **Paraphrase/Rephrase** (*A more elaborate Validation Statement -or- a more concise Listen & Recall*): Intentionally focusing on the verbalized parts of the speaker's message and articulating back a fresh and concise paraphrased statement. It's helpful to use keywords and ideas from the speaker's message in a rephrased or shortened form.
 - a. Speaker: "I had no idea she felt that way. I didn't even know she read my text like that. I only wanted to know if Alex was invited to the party." Listener: "You didn't mean to offend her, just needed more information". Speaker: "exactly, I had so much going on....."
4. **Perception Check** (*Am I seeing/understanding their meaning behind the message accurately?*): This is usually in the form of a question to allow the speaker to agree/disagree

and correct your reflection. It's important to acknowledge and validate any correction from the speaker (if things are still unclear, then ask another perception check question).

- a. "It sounds like-- you're frustrated with your brother for taking your stuff without asking?"
- b. "Let me see if I'm understanding -- you wanted me to help but you didn't want to ask for it because you knew I was stressed?"
- c. "Okay, so let me get this straight -- you set the boundary with your boss first but then later that day she sent the email and now you're considering quitting.?"

Above material adapted from Kevin J. Drab *The Top Ten Basic Counseling Skills*

Invitation & Asking for Consent/Permission

Like most everything to do with listening, context matters when asking for consent as well. The heart or intention behind asking for consent is inviting choice in the other person as well as letting them know what to expect or what you can offer them. This is another spin-off of being trauma-informed as a listener. To ask permission or give forewarning of your actions invites the other person to make choices based on their needs/preferences. I use invitation, forewarning, and asking permission regularly because I value empowering and honoring those I engage with, especially if they don't know me well.

Common or likely "listener-role" consent/permission examples:

- "Is it okay if I ask about _____, please feel welcome to say 'you'd rather not'." (direct question with a clear 'out' or exit)
- "I'd like to talk about ___ together, but I'm concerned it may not be the best timing". (more indirect invitation or request)
- "I want to make sure we're on the same page, but I understand if you don't want to go into detail about the _____, so no pressure. I think I'm hearing you say____, is that right?" (indirect invitation to avoid details if desired while seeking clarity/understanding)
- "I really want to hear how your day went but I need to finish dinner, is it okay if I cook while you share?" (do I have your permission to listen in a different way?)
- "Would you mind if I left my phone ringer-volume on while we talked, I'm waiting for a call back from _____." (You're asking if the standard way of meeting can be changed.)
- "I would really like to help if I can...Would you like me to _____ on [date/time]?" (What exactly are you offering? Give a specific example of what helping looks like from you.)
- "Would you rather have a listening ear right now or a problem solver? I can do either or both if you'd like." -or- "Would you like to hear feedback from me or give you space to think out

loud?" (Take the guessing out. Invite the other person to choose what kind of support they want from you.)

Things to consider with asking permission/consent:

- It's important to be as aware as possible of power, cultural, and societal differences between yourself and the other person. If you're in power (even if only the other person perceives you in power) it will take more trust, assurance, and specifics to communicate that you are genuinely asking for consent/permission without the other person being afraid of punishment/negative consequences.
- Your affect matters when asking for permission/consent. "Do you want help?" with a stern or flat tone and affect can express annoyance or apathy. "If you want help, I'd like to try?" with a direct yet soft tone and affect can express compassion and genuine interest. (If you intentionally tried to be sincere but the other person perceived something negative; work to avoid defensiveness within yourself and clearly communicate that you're being sincere.)
- Be specific about what you're asking consent for -- maybe even consider adding why you're interested. This will provide context for the speaker so they can better respond.
 - "Would you be comfortable if I gave your number to my friend so they can ask you questions, they were just asking me about ____ .",
 - "Would you mind if I shared your story with my daughter; particularly the part about _____. She is going thru something similar and I think your experience would encourage her."