**Potential Benefits of Reflective Listening for Callers to the Hotline**

**Dr. Terry Smith, Psy.D.**

Reflective listening is a technique that requires listening very carefully and focusing on the caller in order to understand the information that she is sharing and then communicating the information back to the caller to confirm whether or not it was understood correctly. This technique requires that the phone counselor reflect the caller’s information and feelings back to the caller as accurately as possible. A reflective statement is a guess about the caller’s meaning and it has the important function of deepening understanding by clarifying whether the guess was accurate. Reflective statements also allow the caller to hear again the thoughts and feelings that they are expressing. Good reflective listening serves to keep the caller talking, exploring, and considering. Reflective listening involves responding to a caller with a statement. Often the subject of the sentence is the pronoun you. Reflective listening statements should constitute a large portion of the phone counselor’s responses. Reflection is particularly important following open-ended questions.

Reflecting skills are used to check out the essence of both the content and the feelings that the caller has communicated. The phone counselor should paraphrase or use her own words to reflect what the caller has said. In reflective listening the phone counselor will listen to short segments of the caller’s communication and state the essence of it back to the caller in her own words. Breaking the conversations down in small segments allows the phone counselor and caller to digest a workable amount of content and feelings. Following each significant segment of communication allows the phone counselor to express her perceptions of the essence of that segment and check for accuracy with the caller. The reflecting process may involve five steps:

1. **Listen for Cues:** as the caller communicates in three areas:

*Content: (*The words actually stated and the meaning of the words.) In reflecting content of the caller, you focus on the thoughts, ideas, beliefs, facts, data etc.

*Feelings:* (The feelings stated or implied in the communication.) Reflecting feelings is listening accurately to the caller and naming the emotional state of the caller in the phone counselor’s words. It involves stating the feeling word that captures the emotion of the caller. When reflecting feelings, the phone counselor should demonstrate empathy and compassion for the caller. The purpose of reflecting a feeling is to bring vaguely expressed feelings into clearer awareness. Reflecting feelings assists the caller to own her feelings. Feelings are often more central than the content in the caller’s communication. In using feeling reflections, you may begin your response as follows:

* “You are feeling…”
* “You are sounding…”

*Context:* (The information that the phone counselor is aware of that is related to the communication but not stated.) This may include topic areas, speech tone, pitch, fluency and the emotion behind the words communicated. This may also include information previously shared by repeat callers.

1. **Sorting:** Review the information received regarding content, feelings and context to arrive at a judgment about the essence of a particular segment of communication.
2. **Draw a conclusion:** Determine the essence of the caller’s communication. Then formulate a sentence to yourself reflecting what you think the caller is saying.
3. **Express the essence:** In your own words communicate the essence of what you think the caller is saying.
4. **Confirm that you properly understood the message:** The caller is likely to have a response to the reflection. The response is usually either a confirmation that the communication was properly understood or a correction in which the caller will explain her point further for a clearer understanding.

**Reflecting feelings and content**

This skill involves understanding and reflecting both feelings and the related content of the caller in the phone counselor’s own words. The following combine feelings and content in the response:

* “You feel (feeling word) because (content).”
* “You feel\_\_\_\_\_ about\_\_\_\_\_.”
* “You feel\_\_\_\_\_ when\_\_\_\_\_.”
* “You feel\_\_\_\_\_ That\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

**Benefits of Reflective Listening:**

1. It sends a message to the caller that what they have to communicate is important and valued.
2. The caller feels that her communication has been heard and understood.
3. It reinforces positive relationships when the caller receives confirmation that the phone counselor is willing to focus and do her best to understand what the caller is attempting to communicate.
4. It offers feedback on what was communicated and the manner in which it was presented.
5. It provides the opportunity for the phone counselor to check if she heard the communication accurately.
6. It is a strategy to ensure that the phone counselor is staying focused and engaged with the caller.
7. It helps the phone counselor to continue to develop better listening skills.
8. It provides the opportunity for the caller to hear what they have communicated in content and feelings possibly leading to more insight for exploring and considering options.
9. It provides a supportive and receptive approach that encourages the caller to continue to share.
10. It provides the phone counselor with important information for providing support, referrals, etc.
11. It can help the caller vent, sort out issues, express feelings and deal more effectively with emotions.

Information for the above was obtained from:

Miller, W. R, Rollnick, S. (2013) *Motivational Interviewing Helping People Change* (The Guilford Press, Third Edition).

Indeed, Editorial Team (February 22, 2021) *How to Practice Reflective Listening (with Tips and Examples).*

Katz, N. & McNulty, K. (1994) *Reflective Listening.*