

Love & Relationship Quizzes, eBooks for Couples
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Active Listening (Reflective Listening)

Oftentimes, during arguments we focus on getting our own point across rather than listening to our partner. Using this technique will help both individuals feel listened to and understood, even if you disagree. **Note that the tone of voice you use for reflections is important.*

How to start

Because it's a conversation there's a speaker and a listener. One chooses to speak first while the other listens. (Later, you'll swap roles.)

The speaker chooses a topic and may start with "I'd like to talk about ...". The speaker uses one short sentence at a time. Remember it has to be short because the other person has to repeat it and feel what it's like for you. It also stops long-winded monologues and emotions rising.

The listener just listens, and repeats back what they have heard. Note: The listener is not allowed to embellish or give their "side" to the "argument" yet!

The listener repeats back in their own words and continues until the partner agrees that the listener has understood.

Examples of phrases to use:

"I hear you saying that..."

"It sounds like you feel..."

"You're telling me that..."

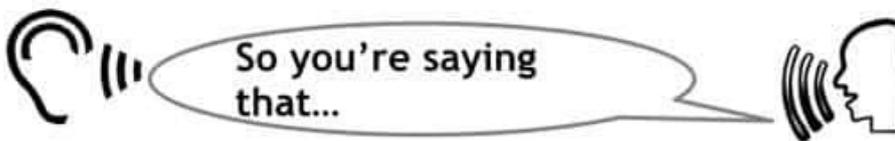
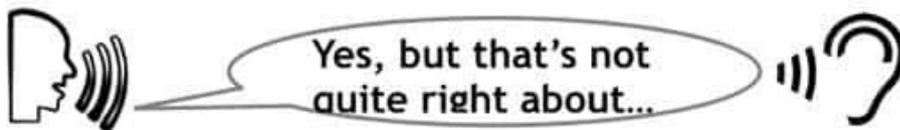
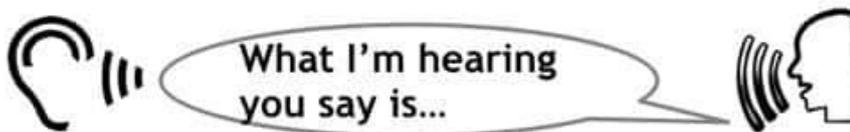
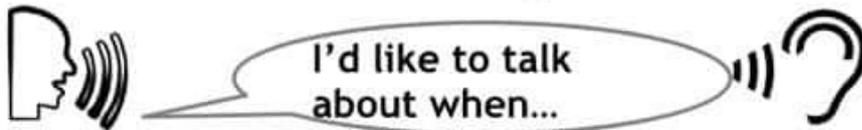
The speaker continues, or corrects the listener if what they heard wasn't quite right. ("What I actually said was..." or "That's not quite right, I said...").

Note: The listener's role is important and they should stay very aware and involved. Mere parroting of the speaker will not work! The speaker wants validation and to be heard much more so than brainstorming for a solution.

The speaking / listening sequence continues until the speaker has finished what they wanted to say and feels heard and understood.



Reflective Listening



Now Swap Roles

Now it's time to swap roles. The speaker becomes the listener and the listener becomes the speaker.

Once the second speaker is done, the first speaker may want to go again. The process continues in this open-ended way until both partners have completed what they wanted to say and both feel they have been listened to correctly (from the feedback they've received from the listener).

Essentially, it's checking-in with ourselves, because we have the time to think about what is most important to say. We are really listening and giving time to understand each other more deeply.

This process may take anything from 5 minutes to 30 minutes.

What not to do

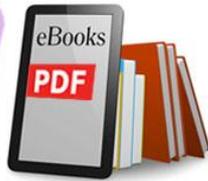
You should not be thinking about what you want to say while you are listening, because that is not listening!

Don't push for an outcome, it will not work

Don't interrupt

Don't defend yourself or give your perspective

Don't just summarise; repeat back what you've heard



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Don't disagree with the speaker... you'll have your turn. If you do you will get a defensive response.

Mastery

Once you have mastered the skill of Reflective Listening then you can use it in daily interactions, as a single sentence ("So what I'm hearing you say is..."). Just check in when you are not sure you understand what is happening for your partner.

Or you can ask your partner to reflect back what you have said, if you feel it is important and want to make sure they are not making assumptions or jumping to conclusions.

Outcomes

Couples who take the effort to follow the steps of Reflective Listening carefully can be in for some positive surprises. They feel differently after the process. It may take some time and practice at the beginning but it is well worth the effort.

Once a couple gets familiar with the practice and knows that talking is safe it can be used just to check that you really have understood what is happening for the other person. It ultimately saves a huge amount of time arguing and the pain of feeling misunderstood.

Reflective listening is simple but takes practice. It is a way of showing that you want to resolve an issue and not just "have your say."

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Some couples struggle at the beginning to break their negative habits of interrupting, dismissing and rushing in to fix a problem with a practical solution – rather than staying with their partner while the real answer unfolds. But keep practicing!

At Ghita Therapy we are of course happy to help you to practice these skills to add them to your relationship toolbox. Try the 2 hour workshop.

www.ghitaandersen.com/couples-workshops.html