

memo

DATE: February 16, 2022
TO: Local Agency Staff
FROM: State WIC Staff
SUBJECT: Reflective Listening: Eighth in a Nutrition Assessment Series

Reflective listening lets the speaker know you have been listening and helps to check your understanding of what is being shared and the emotion behind it. Reflective listening involves paying close attention to what you hear and see, so that you may get a clear picture of what the participant is sharing. This allows you to demonstrate a mutual understanding, clearly and empathetically, in your own words.

Reflections are statements, not questions. With reflective listening, you may encourage the participant to further explore what has been shared and encourage momentum to move the conversation forward. The intent is to allow the participant to come to their own solution and potentially set a goal for a realistic and manageable change. It is important to remember that the participant is the expert when it comes to their life; be sure not to presume you know or judge them for what they are saying or doing. The most effective changes come from their own motivation to get there, and your support will make it feel more manageable.

Advantages of Reflective Listening

Reflective Listening

- shows empathy and respect for the participants.
- builds trust and decreases resistance.
- increases opportunity for open sharing.
- creates a safe space to correct misunderstanding.

When to Use Reflective Listening

Reflective listening can occur at various points during your conversation with a participant. You may use a reflection after a response to an open-ended question, to encourage the participant to say more. If you hear ambivalence in their response, this is another opportunity to reflect. You may also sense a strong feeling towards the subject you are discussing; reflecting on that can center the participant and let them know it is safe to share. If a client expresses a desire to change or is resistant to move forward, a reflection can show you understand and respect where they are at with it. Finally, reflecting on the outcome of the conversation helps to make sure you are both on the same page and offers a place to follow up for the next visit.

Types of Reflections

Simple Reflection

Simple Reflections are short statements that relay back to the participant that you have heard and understand what has been shared. Simple reflections may help to gain clarification.

Example:

Participant: "I know that Sarah should be off the bottle, but it helps her fall asleep."

CPA: "Offering Sarah the bottle makes bedtime easier."

Complex Reflection

A Complex Reflection will go deeper, from understanding to offering a new perspective on what has been shared. Complex Reflections can help gain momentum in the conversation.

Example:

Participant: "The bottle does make bedtime easier. Giving her some warm milk in the bottle relaxes her and she sleeps through the night."

CPA: "When Sarah sleeps through the night, you can get more sleep yourself."

Double-Sided Reflection

With a Double-Sided Reflection, we can explore the participant's ambivalence toward change. It may be good to start with what is happening and end with a statement that can lead to a goal.

Example:

Participant: "I know you shouldn't give milk at night because it can cause dental problems, but I do check her teeth to make sure they look okay."

CPA: "You like knowing she is sleeping well and know that you need to keep her teeth clean to avoid dental caries."

Summary

The Summary will reflect on the conversation as a whole and guide the participant into the goal setting process.

Example:

Participant: "Well, I have heard about dental problems that kids have when they are on the bottle too long. Sarah is only 2, and I plan to get her off before she starts preschool for sure. I do try to wipe her teeth off when she has bath time."

CPA: "Okay, so if I am understanding you so far, you know that taking the bottle away would decrease the risk of dental caries, you are keeping Sarah's teeth clean, and you have a plan for when you would like to get her off the bottle."

Staff Practice

Scenario:

Jody is a new participant arriving at the WIC clinic for her pregnant woman certification. Jody shares that she is currently homeless and has been living at the local shelter. She is offered three daily meals but finds that the meals are not foods she would normally eat. Jody also shares she has been so nauseous throughout the day it is hard to get to the dining area on time to grab a plate. Additionally, anyone that stays in the shelter is on their own for daily snacks. Jody is getting food support benefits, but she is not sure what snacks are healthiest for the baby.

1. What information have you heard or observed that is relevant to the assessment?

Examples:

- Homelessness
- Limited access to food
- Nausea during pregnancy

2. What type of reflection would you start with?

Examples:

- Simple Reflection: "Even though food is available, you often don't feel well enough to get to it."
- Simple Reflection: "It sounds like dealing with nausea is making eating a challenge right now."

3. How can you get Jody to share more?

Example:

- Complex Reflection: "You don't really like the foods offered at the shelter, and you also want to make sure you eat healthy things."
- Complex Reflection: "The nausea is making it hard for you to attend meals and you're not sure what snacks are healthy for you and the baby."

4. What can you say to get Jody to explore her thoughts on changes that could be made?

Example:

- Double-sided Reflection: "The food at the center is not what you would make on your own, but you could use your food support to purchase things you would eat."
- Double-sided Reflection: "The nausea is making it hard for you to attend meals and having healthy snacks you can grab quickly would help you."

5. How can you wrap up the session with Jody?

Example:

- Summary: “Thank you for coming in today and being so open about your situation. I can understand how the nausea with this pregnancy is complicating things for you. As the pregnancy progresses, you may find the nausea decrease and some foods start to become more tolerable. For now, I hope that the snack ideas we discussed will help. I am glad to hear you plan to have a healthy snack 2-3 times a day. I look forward to seeing how things are going at our next visit.”

Staff Tools

[Tip # 95 The Power of Reflecting](#) (Molly Kellogg, RD, LCSW)

[Washington WIC Connects- Energizer 3 Reflections](#) (Washington WIC Program)

[Oregon WIC Listens- Continuing Education: Mirror, Mirror on the Wall- Reflections](#) (Oregon WIC program)

References- Complete Listing of Hyperlinks:

[Tip # 95 The Power of Reflecting](https://mollykellogg.com/tip-95-the-power-of-reflecting/) (<https://mollykellogg.com/tip-95-the-power-of-reflecting/>)

[Washington WIC Connects- Energizer 3 Reflections](#)

(<https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/prevention/azwic/agencies/trainers/resources-nutrition-educators/9-wic-connects-energizer-reflections.pdf>)

[Oregon WIC Listens- Continuing Education: Mirror, Mirror on the Wall- Reflections](#)

(https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/HealthyPeopleFamilies/wic/Documents/orwl/ce_reflections_1_staff.pdf)

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