



COMMUNICATION SKILL

Reflective Listening

Hearing your partner is not the same as truly listening to them.

Reflective listening goes beyond simply waiting for your turn to speak. It requires slowing down, setting aside your own reactions, and genuinely working to understand what your partner is experiencing — both in their words and beneath them. When both partners practice this skill, conversations shift from battles to bridges.

The 5 Steps of Reflective Listening

- 1** **Pause and be fully present** — Put down your phone, make eye contact, and signal with your body that this moment matters. Your partner needs to feel you are with them, not just near them.
- 2** **Listen without interrupting** — Let your partner finish their full thought before you respond. Resist the urge to defend, explain, or problem-solve while they are still speaking.
- 3** **Reflect back what you heard** — Summarize in your own words: "What I'm hearing is..." or "It sounds like you're feeling..." You do not need to agree — only to show you understood.
- 4** **Validate their experience** — Acknowledge that their feelings make sense given their perspective. "That makes sense" or "I can understand why that felt hurtful" goes a long way.
- 5** **Ask before you advise** — "What do you need from me right now — to listen, help problem-solve, or just be here?" This one question prevents most communication misfires.

Reflective Listening IS...	Reflective Listening is NOT...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving your full, undivided attention • Reflecting feelings and content back • Asking open-ended clarifying questions • Validating without necessarily agreeing • Staying curious about their inner world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiting for your turn to speak • Immediately offering solutions or advice • Debating the facts of what happened • Dismissing feelings as overreactions • Finishing their sentences for them

Putting It Into Practice — Phrase Swaps

Situation	Instead of...	Try saying...
Partner shares frustration	"You're overreacting."	"It sounds like that really hurt. Tell me more."
Partner feels unheard	"I already said I was sorry."	"I hear that you still feel hurt. What do you need from me?"
Partner is stressed	"Just calm down."	"You seem really overwhelmed. I'm here — what's going on?"
Partner shares a fear	"That won't happen."	"That fear sounds really real for you. I want to understand it."