

Using Reflection and Empathy

Reflection

Reflection is an important skill for implementing HIV Intervention. Reflection is when the receiver of a message reflects or “mirrors” back the words of the person giving a message to make sure s/he has really understood the message. The receiver picks up on the messages sent by the giver’s body language and tone of voice, as well as the words used. Some psychologists believe that 80% of what a person communicates is through her/his body language.

Reflecting helps the receiver make sure s/he is following the story, and helps the person giving the message feel listened to and validated. Reflection is a good tool, but sometimes it can be overused. Sometimes a listener may want to jump in and reflect during a lull in conversation. This lull or quiet pause may be an important time not to interrupt if the message giver is thinking or gathering thoughts.

Reflection statements often should line:

- “Sounds like you are feeling a lot of pressure to have sex without a condom.”
- “What I hear you saying is that you are not sure you want to stay with your partner, after he cheated on you.”
- “So let me see if I understand you. You are scared to tell the woman you are dating that you have herpes.”

Empathy

Empathy helps HIV prevention workers connect with their clients. Empathy is the emotional identification with another person’s experience. One does not necessarily share the feeling of the other person, but can relate to the feeling. The listener can empathize with the feelings of the person giving messages by trying to name or pinpoint feelings. If the listener does not “hit” the right feeling, the person giving the message will probably clarify or correct. It’s not “bad” to hit the wrong feeling. This shows the person giving messages that you are listening and trying to understand, and gives her/him an opportunity to describe the experience more fully/deeply. Some feelings used to empathize might be:

Afraid	Satisfied	Powerful	Vulnerable	Appreciated	Relieved
Supported	Trusted	Respected	Powerless	Ashamed	Safe
Worn out	Offended	Insulted	Concerned	Foolish	Energized
Alone	Defeated	Enraged	Surprised	Shocked	Provoked
Peaceful	Left out	Encouraged	Insignificant	Accomplished	Loved