

## REFLECTIVE RESPONSES

In reflective responses we need to demonstrate that we are open and receptive to what the other person is feeling and thinking. When we reflect what others are feeling, it often dissipates those feelings and makes it easier to communicate with them.

Rather than denying the person's perceptions, you do better to respond reflectively and with concern. This is accomplished if you learn to focus your attention on how the other person is feeling rather than on your own feelings of uncertainty or opposition.

Reflective responses are useful when one is communicating something "odd" to us, when they are being oppositional, or when we are being challenged for some action we have to take that makes them mad. When in doubt of what to say, reflect on what they are saying.

Reflective responses give them the message we hear them, we understand, and we care. This does not necessarily mean we agree, but we do not deny or dismiss what they are going through. This puts them on the defense. We have to control our feelings and see from their point of view. In reflective responses, we put ourselves in the other person's shoes. When we validate their experience they feel understood, touched, and cared for. Validation also decompresses and calms the situation. What a person in distress needs most is a receptive, empathetic ear. You are not agreeing with them, you are taking the time to acknowledge the reality of his/her experience, instead of jumping in to disconfirm it.

What you are doing is staying with the feelings that have been communicated. This means you are going to listen for the emotional content of what you are hearing, rather than getting upset about the words. In this way, you can reflect back the essential part of the other person's communication.

### FOUR BASIC STEPS FOR MAKING REFLECTIVE RESPONSES

1. Acknowledge the reality of the other person's experience. This is their reality not your reality.
2. Respond to what this experience must feel like to them, not to you.
3. Communicate that you understand what s/he believes and how he/she feels
4. After you reflect their experience/feelings then, if necessary, you may attempt to correct, "disconfirm" or state what you think is the truth about the situation.

Now we will practice some reflective responding with sample dialogues.