

## Reflective Listening: An Essential Tool for Resolving Conflict and Demonstrating Mutual Support

### BASICS

*Most people are familiar with the experience of a disagreement spiraling into an argument. One or both of the people in the discussion may feel unheard, misunderstood, disrespected, and/or just plain frustrated. All too often conversations feel like a rough tennis match - words are rapidly flying back and forth without anyone feeling like they have made progress. It is natural to fight for your viewpoint to be understood, and this document will help you and your partner achieve the goal of mutual understanding and mutual respect.*



Reflective listening is a “checking-in” exercise in which statements are clarified, validated, and truly appreciated. Though it can feel artificially structured, reflective listening can actually be very efficient, as it:

- Reduces repetition of statements because both parties feel understood.
- Accurately clarifies broad questions so that they can have specific answers.
- Clarifies directions so that each party can proceed with appropriate action.
- Manages conflicts without getting mired in insults, digging-in behavior, and other unhealthy communication habits.

#### Sample statements that show reflective listening:

- “It looks like you had a really interesting day.”
- “I hear that I offended you when I made that joke about your family.”
- “It appears like the teachers are ganging up on you.”
- “You are excited about the possible promotion.”
- “It sounds like you want me to initiate a date night at least once a month.”
- “From your point of view, their political ideas are ridiculous.”
- “As you see it, our child will be better prepared for college if they attend a private school.”
- “You believe/think that I am uninterested in what you care about.”
- “It seems like you are the only person dealing with this issue.”

#### Not Just for Conflict Resolution

Research shows that demonstrating support (i.e., how partners help each other with a problem or goal) is vital to relationship strength, even more impactful than conflict resolution. **Here are four kinds of support:**

- ❖ Emotional - (e.g., reflective listening in a warm tone of voice, holding hands)
- ❖ Tangible - (e.g., an act of service like helping with a partner’s chores)
- ❖ Esteem - (e.g., words of affirmation like, “I know you can do this!”)
- ❖ Informational - (e.g., giving advice)

