

Reflective Empathy

Reflective Empathy is a way of both verifying your understanding of the other's narrative, and of making contact with the other, letting them know that you are with them. The point is: (1) to ensure that the speaker feels understood; (2) to make human contact with the speaker; and (3) to understand the party's story from their point of view.

STEPS

1. Reflect back what you heard the party say. Can use your own words. Stay on the level of the content/text and feeling that they're actually expressing or exhibiting.

Examples: "So what I'm hearing you say is"

"So it sounds like the first thing that happened is"

"You were upset and angry when you were served with the complaint"

2. Verify that your reflection was accurate and complete.

Examples: "Did I get that right?"

"Did I miss anything?"

"Is there anything more?"

3. Distinguish between negative and positive feedback, verbal and nonverbal.

Examples: "Yes, that's it exactly."

"Well, you sort of got it."

"No, you didn't get it at all."

4. If you don't get confirmation that you got it right, keep asking questions and reflecting back until you do. There are no mistakes—just positive and negative feedback.

5. The point is not to "do reflective empathy well," "get it right," or solve a problem. The point is to be curious, open, and attuned.