

How reflective listening can help workplace relationships and support the wellbeing of your pharmacy team



INFORMATION SHEET

What is reflective listening?

One of the skills we can utilise when talking to others is active listening. To actively listen is not just to hear someone, it is to use listening skills to understand and evaluate what they have said. Active listening encourages two-way communication. It can make the person speaking feel more comfortable to share information with you. Reflective listening is one aspect of active listening. So many times, when we should be listening to someone else, we are actually busy formulating a reply or thinking about how what they are sharing impacts us. This can have a detrimental effect on our ability to really understand what the other person is saying and can be frustrating for the speaker when they don't feel listened to.

Why practise reflective listening?

Reflective listening is a part of respectful communication because it focuses on properly hearing what the other person is telling you. It can seem simple, but reflective listening is a skill that can take practice to hone. When using reflective listening, the listener both clarifies and restates what the speaker has said. This is helpful because the speaker feels properly listened to and understood, and the listener gains a better understanding of the speaker.

Becoming defensive is something that can block someone from really hearing what another person has to say.

Take, for example, an employee who is concerned about the amount of support they get from a manager. A defensive response would be:

"I already give this employee as much as I can. They get as much support as anyone else – why would they want more? They need to learn to cope."

The manager might feel criticised and annoyed.

A non-defensive way to look at it might be:

"This employee really values the support and feedback that I give and is doing their best to grow as a pharmacist. It's really good that they can ask for what they need and be honest – I will do my best to give any support I can."

You can see that the defensive response shuts the conversation down and can make the employee feel that they were wrong for making the request, whereas the non-defensive response allows the listener to hear what the employee needs and to respond.

How to use reflective listening

- Listen carefully to what the person is saying.
- Reflect back what you've heard to check your understanding.
- Let the person confirm if you've understood them correctly.
- Only move to solutions after you're sure you understand.

Example:

A pharmacy employee may say to their manager:

"I am struggling to find the time to complete my work. Before I even finish one task, I am given another set of tasks to complete, and I feel like I am always rushing to catch up. I don't feel like I can even take a break for lunch."

The manager listens attentively, then may say:

"So it sounds like you feel like you are constantly working and are given more work before you complete what you already have to do. You feel so busy that you cannot even take a break. Have I got that right?"

This may sound a bit repetitive, but it actually feels to the listener like you really "get" what they are saying. And the conversation doesn't stop there. Once you've established that you do understand what the problem is, you can then move into brainstorming solutions with the person you're managing. It's important not to jump to this step too soon.

Now you've learnt about reflective listening check out our [activity resource](#) to put this into practice!



This information is adapted from our [Embracing a Workplace Wellbeing Culture](#) course for pharmacy managers, leaders, and supervisors.

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