

## REFLECTION

When a counselor uses reflection, s/he accurately describes the client's affective state from either verbal or nonverbal cues. By listening for and responding to the feelings of the client rather than the content of their statement you are communicating that you can accurately sense the world as they are perceiving it. This facilitates the client's movement toward greater self-awareness and self-understanding. In order to do this, you must listen to how the person says what they say. For example, they may speak more quickly when communicating enthusiasm (or anxiety), more slowly when discouraged, and so forth.

### Example:

- Client: "So, I'm wondering if you can help me choose a new major... (pause), I suppose if I did choose, I'd just screw things up again..."
- Counselor: "You're feeling hopeless about being able to succeed and you're not sure anybody or anything will help."
- Client: "I just can't figure out why things have been so difficult here. Everything came so easily to me in high school. Everyone at home still thinks I'm the smartest guy around but they have no idea that I'm really just stupid, but it's only a matter of time."
- Counselor: "You are embarrassed that you haven't lived up to other people's expectations of you. You feel like a fraud and that you will be discovered at any time."

### **Some behaviors you may want to try and follow are:**

- 1) Listen for the feelings. Remember that what the person is saying is only part of the message being communicated to you. How the person says it is extremely important (i.e., a change in breathing or in the speed of talk, a sigh, a blush, a stammer, extra emphasis on a particular word). Any of these can be important cues to underlying feelings.
- 2) Frequent or idiosyncratic words which communicate emotions and feelings should also be noted. These verbal behaviors will give you clues as to the "emotional themes" of the client and their repertoire of "feeling words".
- 3) Time your responses. You do not need to respond to every comment. You may simply want to smile, nod, say "Umm-hmm", etc., until there is an occasional opportunity to reflect the feelings of the client.
- 4) Reflect feelings. As you listen for and find instances of a client's expression of affect, reflect these emotions by restating what she/he is experiencing in your own words. If the client should say, "I wish I could talk to my dad about things like this, but I never seem to get up the nerve", you might respond with something like, "You're a little bit afraid of your dad?"

Your goal is to understand what the person is experiencing and to communicate "I am with you. . . I can accurately sense the world as you are feeling and perceiving. . ." Don't worry about making a mistake -- usually they will just correct you and go on, knowing that you are trying to understand her or him.