

REFLECTIVE LISTENING EXERCISES

The purpose of these initial communication exercises is to ensure each family member is on the same page.

“It has been my experience that high-conflict co-parents are often not only not on the same page but not even in the same book.”

As a result, their time and energy are focused on everything else except on what the actual co-parenting problem is. So, to ensure that you are going to be more efficient and decrease the conflict in your co-parenting relationship you have to improve your communication with each other. You are not trying to solve problem(s) or to defend your position, you are trying to create a healthy environment that will allow you and your family to repair the damage done during the divorce process and learn how to support and validate each other.

Exercise A: 1 Family Member Shares / 1 Family Member Reflects

One family member shares his/her thoughts/feelings with the other family member(s), pausing every few minutes to allow the other family member(s) to reflect back what they hear them saying.

(Remember: The reflecting family member reflecting is not just parroting back what they heard them say, but why it is important to them and/or how it makes them think/feel).

If the family member reflects back what they heard correctly, then the sharing family member will acknowledge they are correct and continue to share, if applicable. If the reflecting family member is not correct, then the sharing family member should gently and calmly restate what the reflecting family member did not get correct.

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After 10-15 minutes (timer goes off). Stop. Thank each other for listening and sharing. Go to different rooms and write down your experience(s) of the exercise. If it helps, you can answer the following questions.

- 1.) What was it like for me to share without being interrupted or what was it like for me to listen without responding?
- 2.) What did I want to say?
- 3.) What was said or done that “pushed my buttons?”
- 4.) How did I feel before the family meeting?
- 5.) What thoughts ran through my mind before, during, and after the family meeting?
- 6.) What did I want to say?
- 7.) When was it hard for me not to respond? How did it make me feel?
- 8.) What was said that “pushed my buttons?”
- 9.) What am I using to support my beliefs? Identifying facts versus assumptions.
- 10.) What would I do differently?
- 11.) What would I want different next time that would improve the process?

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Exercise B: **Both Family Members Share and Reflect**

During this reflective listening exercise, both family members get to take turns sharing and reflecting back what they heard. Follow the instructions above for each family member. **Important:** This is not the time for rebuttals. The second family member sharing should pick a different topic than what was shared by the first family member.

TIP: Use “I” Statements when sharing

Consider using “I” statements to better understand your own emotional/behavioral experiences and communicating them in a correct and effective manner. Below is a commonly used “I” statement template.

“I FEEL” _____

“WHEN YOU” _____

“BECAUSE I THOUGHT” _____

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