

## **Counseling Tips for Nutrition Therapists**

### **Tip #6 Mirroring**

*Clarity of observation is possible only  
when we are able to suspend judgment.*

Shale Paul

Mirroring, or reflective listening, is repeating what you have heard in your own words until you are sure that you have indeed heard it fully and accurately. It includes asking your clients if they have been heard.

#### Examples of mirroring with words:

- “What I hear you saying is ...”
- “So you feel ...”
- “Let me see if I heard you correctly. You....”
- “It sounds like ...”
- “You really care about/want ... don’t you?”
- “Is there more that I’ve missed ...?”

Most of us use mirroring naturally here and there. Radical mirroring is when you **simply stay with the process** of mirroring and hold no other agenda. It means no moving on to solutions or advice. It means continuing with mirroring until the client naturally shifts.

We can also **mirror a client’s emotions**. This is done by modulating vocal tone or words or body language to resonate with the client’s emotional state. Generally it’s best to do this only briefly to gain rapport and then shift back to a helping stance.

#### Advantages:

Mirroring allows for the most **accurate information exchange**. You can effectively check your assumptions. Many times I have been surprised when I assumed I understood the meaning of something to a client and, after mirroring, a completely different (and important) meaning emerged.

By mirroring, you **show empathy and respect**. Think of the best listeners you know. The ones who make you feel cared about and valued. You feel their focus is on you. It is likely they mirror you often. The next time you are with one of these people, notice what they do.

This approach encourages clients to explore and respect **what is true for them**. Have you ever had an insight or come up with a great idea in conversation with someone who was simply acting as a sounding board? Your mirroring helps clients learn what they need to about themselves to attain their goals.

Mirroring **reminds you** to stay in a stance where the answers are in the client. In order to carefully mirror, you need to stay focused on your client with only a secondary focus on your own agenda. It’s good training.

Clients who are mirrored will often shift out of a stuck place. It **slows the process** and contributes to reflection. For clients who stay in a complaining or blaming place, holding up a verbal mirror can show them something useful if they are ready to see it. It might be that what they are doing isn’t working, or that now they have been heard and can move on, or that their husband isn’t really to blame. Let them figure out the lesson; all you need do is mirror.

Finally, mirroring is a safe place to go when you don't know what to do next. The next time **you feel clueless or helpless** during a session, take a deep breath and simply mirror what you just heard and keep mirroring until something shifts. If nothing else, it gives you a chance to catch your breath. More likely, though, it will give you something in the client that you can respond to.

Cautions:

Occasionally a client may get annoyed with your mirroring because she wants something else from you at that moment. If you get this feedback, move along with her agenda. However, most of us **use mirroring much less than we could** and err in the direction of leaving it too soon. If we let fear of annoying our clients cause us to let go too soon, we may miss something useful. It's better to trust your clients to indicate when they are ready to move on.

Expert mirroring **takes practice**. Search for times to play with it. Try mirroring your children and spouse several times a day for a week. You may like the results. You could also ask colleagues and friends to let you practice. Ask them to talk about something of interest to them while you mirror. Do it for at least 10 minutes, even if it feels awkward.

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