

Summarizing

Summaries are special applications of reflective listening. They can be used throughout a conversation but are particularly helpful at transition points, for example, after the person has spoken about a particular topic, has recounted a personal experience, or when the encounter is nearing an end.

Summarizing helps to ensure that there is clear communication between the speaker and listener. Also, it can provide a stepping stone towards change.

Structure of Summaries

- 1) Begin with a statement indicating you are making a summary. For example:
 - Let me see if I understand so far ...
 - Here is what I've heard. Tell me if I've missed anything.
- 2) Give special attention to Change Statements. These are statements made by the client that point towards a willingness to change. Miller and Rollnick have identified four types of change statements, all of which overlap significantly:
 - Problem recognition *"My use has gotten a little out of hand at times."*
 - Concern *"If I don't stop, something bad is going to happen."*
 - Intent to change *"I'm going to do something, I'm just not sure what it is yet."*
 - Optimism *"I know I can get a handle on this problem."*
- 3) If the person expresses ambivalence, it is useful to include both sides in the summary statement. For example: "On the one hand ..., on the other hand ..."
- 4) It is legitimate to include information in summary statements from other sources (e.g. your own clinical knowledge, research, courts, family).
- 5) Be concise.
- 6) End with an invitation. For example:
 - Did I miss anything?
 - If that's accurate, what other points are there to consider?
 - Anything you want to add or correct?
- 7) Depending on the response of the client to your summary statement, it may lead naturally to planning for or taking concrete steps towards the change goal.

(Adapted from Motivational Interviewing materials by David B. Rosengren, Ph.D. and from Motivational Interviewing by Miller & Rollnick, 1991)