



Student Handout

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Matching and Mirroring

Active listening involves being in rapport or “in tune” with the person we are listening to. One way of helping achieve rapport, so that the other person can feel more comfortable and safe in our presence, is matching: adopting aspects of their behaviour, such as particular body language, gestures, tone of voice or forms of speech.

In everyday life, people tend to do this naturally. When with others, you might suddenly notice that you and the person you’re with have adopted the same posture. Or at a social occasion you might notice that people who are getting on well together lift their glasses to drink at the same time. These are natural signs of being in tune, in rapport with each other. Singing and dancing are powerful ways to build rapport because anything that involves moving or breathing in unison works to create rapport.

When you practice listening skills, you deliberately work on matching aspect of the other person’s behaviour to help build rapport:

Posture, e.g. crossing your legs if they cross theirs, leaning forwards to match their posture.

Voice e.g. talking slowly or quietly if the other person is talking that way.

Gesture e.g. nodding, or using similar hand or arm movements

Choice of words. e.g. matching a person who tends to use visually-oriented words might involve saying “The picture I’m getting seems to be ...” rather than “It sounds as if ...”

Sometimes you may hear the term “mirroring”. This is where you are precisely matching portions of the other person’s behaviour. For example, matching someone’s body language might mean adopting a relaxed posture if they have a relaxed posture. Mirroring their body language might mean putting your arms or legs in the same position as they do.



When you first start practicing matching and mirroring skills, it may feel unnatural. But with practice you may be surprised how easily it can be done in a natural way.

At first, you may feel like it's phoney or insincere to deliberately match the other person. But the key thing is that if it is to be sincere, it has to be done with an attitude of genuine acceptance and a sincere wish to empathically understand the other person. In other words, it must be done congruently.

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