

## Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is a way to check that the client's and the social worker's perceptions are similar and that there is a shared understanding between them. Paraphrasing focuses on the content of the client's message and the thinking/cognition of the client. The social worker restates what the client has said using his or her own words (Boyle et al., 2011; Hepworth, Rooney, & Larsen, 2013). Paraphrasing can elicit feedback from the client, confirming that the social worker understands the meaning of the client's message. A paraphrase conveys that, generally, the client has been heard and now can move on to another aspect of the topic. In the following clip, the instructor defines the skill of paraphrase: How and when is it helpful to use paraphrase in an interview?

### Paraphrase

The paraphrase points out what the client has said and his or her view of the situation under discussion. It should not reflect the social worker's viewpoint or opinion. Box 5.5 demonstrates a social worker using the paraphrasing skill and lead-in response to better comprehend how the client understands her problem.

In the example in Box 5.5, the social worker captures the true meaning of Mary's addictive spending pattern. Hearing this "cycle" repeated back to Mary highlights for her the major counseling issue: developing other ways to reduce stress and conflict in her life. Also, in this example, the social worker uses two types of lead-in responses: auditory ("If I am hearing you correctly . . .") and visual ("You are describing . . .").

In this video clip, watch as Louis paraphrases what Kim just said by stating, "You were always on high alert." Does he capture the true meaning of her words? Does she feel understood?

Paraphrasing should not be used so excessively as to avoid conveying the impression that the social worker is simply mimicking what the client is saying. Instead, the social worker should express the important words and ideas back to the client (Milroy, O'Melia, & Dubois, 2011). Be true to the essence of what the client has said. Paraphrasing should be used in conjunction with other methods of facilitating the client's responses, such as reflection of feelings and interpretation. Paraphrasing helps the client see clearly what he or she is thinking or experiencing. Hearing the social worker restate ideas gives the client an opportunity to rethink or to see issues from a different perspective (Hepworth et al., 2013). It is always a good idea to check back with the client after delivering a

### Box 5.5 Mary—Paraphrasing

**M**ary is a 47-year-old female who has been struggling with finances. She spends money excessively and is deeply in debt.

**Social Worker:** What do you experience when you go to the mall? (Open-ended question)

**Mary:** I go in the evening, especially when I'm feeling stressed. The kids will get me upset, and I'll go straight to the mall after dinner.

**Social Worker:** If I am hearing you correctly, most of the time you go to the mall because of a difficult situation at home. (Lead-in response and paraphrase)

**Mary:** Yeah, I'll feel frustrated, and then when I go shopping, I get this intense rush. I mean, it really works. I charge up my credit cards on a lot of things I really don't need. It gives

me a quick thrill. But by the time I get home, I feel like crap because I realize that I've just dug myself deeper into debt.

**Social Worker:** Your excessive spending is a way to help you feel better. But you are not sure how else to manage all the feelings you have pent up inside. (Paraphrase)

**Mary:** Yeah, I feel awful, and then I feel worthless. That's when my husband and I fight—and then I just want to go back to the mall. The whole thing just keeps going round and round.

**Social Worker:** You are describing this as a pattern or a cycle you spend money to relieve stress but then regret your actions. And then it starts all over. (Lead-in/paraphrase)

**Mary:** That's exactly it.

paraphrase by asking, "Is that right?" or "Am I following you correctly?" This is the social worker's chance to modify the response, depending on the client's reaction to what was just stated. Importantly, a paraphrase focuses on the client's thought process and less on his or her emotional experiences. Read the client's response in Box 5.5 and then write a paraphrase in the indicated space.

### Reflection of Feelings

Reflection of feelings is one of the most important skills in the social worker's repertoire. It requires the social worker to restate and explore the client's affective (feeling) statements. Frequently, the client is experiencing a wide variety of feelings and has difficulty

### Box 5.5.A Now You Try It . . . Paraphrasing

**A** father is talking to the home interventionist about his children.

"I want to get my life back in order. I know I messed up in the past, but I want my kids back. They have been away from me for too long—it's been almost a year. Imagine, strangers raising my kids. I know the foster care system is supposed to help us. Frankly, I think things are much worse since that social worker got involved."

A. Key points in the client's message:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

B. Your paraphrasing response:

1. \_\_\_\_\_