Yet we also do NOT have to be right in identifying the emotion or reason we hear, because the speaker will automatically clarify it for us (and sometimes for him/her in the process).

What we need to remember is that when we use Reflection, the other person is going to continue talking about what she/he is experiencing, so we need to make sure we have time to listen.

When we first begin using I-statements and Reflection, it can feel artificial. It doesn’t take long for them to become automatic. Experiment with them, and you may find that your discussions with other people become much more productive and satisfying.

**Fighting Fairly**
A major stumbling block in any relationship is settling disagreements, which often reduce to emotional shouting matches rather than caring problem-solving. Basic ground rules for effectively facing conflict in a relationship include:

1. Maintain a spirit of good will - remember: you care about this person.
2. Avoid attacking one another-discuss behaviors not personalities.
3. Share your feelings-explore and discuss them.
4. Focus on the present; past disappointments cannot be changed. Concentrate on here and now.

**Specific Techniques:**
1. Choose a time to have the discussion make it an appointment. Avoid those times when either of you are fatigued, ill, or under pressure.
2. Be specific: take time to reflect on what you are upset about and focus on specific actions, feelings, and attitudes.
3. Listen carefully. Allow each individual uninterrupted time to explain his/her viewpoint.
4. Work on one issue at a time. Decide what is the uppermost concern and discuss it.
5. Ask for reasonable change. Determine what you really want from the person, then ask yourself if it is realistic and authentic. Give the person a chance to correct the situation.
6. Try to accept: be open to the other person’s feelings and accept them without being judgmental.
7. Be willing to compromise: avoid trying to win. Try to find a solution that is satisfying for you both.
8. Realize the need to accept an incomplete resolution of a conflict. At times, completely resolving an issue is impossible.
9. If you have extreme difficulty expressing your feelings, try writing them down in a note or letter.
10. After the discussion is over, EXPRESS YOUR APPRECIATION for the other’s listening to and discussing the issue with you. Reaffirm your respect and affection for each other. Finish on a positive note.

These strategies can help you establish an atmosphere of cooperative problem-solving. If you feel the relationship has deteriorated to a point where these methods can’t be tried, you may want to consider a neutral, non-judgmental third party to mediate the discussions.
Getting Close

Developing meaningful relationships is a concern for all of us. Getting close to others, sharing our joys, sorrows, needs, wants, affections, and excitements is risky business. What is it that interferes with us getting close to each other? Often it is one or more of these common fears:

1. **Fear of becoming known as we really are.** Opening ourselves to others and their reactions is not only difficult for us, but it puts a demand on others to be likewise.

2. **Fear of pain and disappointment.** Mass media and advertisers have tried to convince us that we should be 100% happy 24 hours a day. Hurt, pain, disappointment, and loneliness are not comfortable feelings, but they are human. Without the risk of experiencing them, one can never experience loving and being loved.

3. **Fear of losing our freedom.** Can I risk giving up some of mine to care about you, without you wanting to take it all away? Can I be both close and separate with you?

4. **Fear of being a taker as well as a giver.** It is difficult for most of us to receive, yet if we don’t, no one can experience the joy of giving to us.

5. **Fear of judgment.** People are reluctant to disclose themselves because they dread the moral judgment of their friends, family, minister, and the law.

6. **Fear that showing love and affection is not proper.** This is especially true for men, but NOT restricted to them. Somehow, we have been convinced that this is a sign of weakness, rather than a sign of courage.

**REWARDS For Conquering Our Fears of Getting Close**

If we learn to communicate effectively with others and are willing to risk sharing our own feelings and respect other’s feelings, many rewards will await us as we learn to get close to another person.

* **Obviously, a very special relationship.** Getting close means you can need someone else and he/she can need you. It means when you feel discouraged or upset, someone is there to comfort and care about you, and you can do likewise.

* **You acquire faith in yourself, faith in others, and an ability to be faithful to others.** It enables you to live fully in the present, and to have meaning and purpose for your own existence.

* **You become more sensitive to yourself, with choices about how, when, and where you wish to share your feelings.** You KNOW when you are experiencing love, joy, anger, etc.

**THE ART OF COMMUNICATION**

When people are asked what the most important ingredients in a relationship are, communication almost always is on the list. Yet we rarely are taught HOW to communicate effectively. Communication with others boils down to either expressing ourselves or responding to someone else, yet the methods for doing each are quite different.

**Expressing Ourselves**

When you are stating an opinion, making an observation, or expressing a feeling, the most appropriate format to use is called an “I-statement.” You may even, hopefully, be already using them. I-statements allow us to state things in positive terms, to express ourselves directly and honestly, and to take responsibility for what we think, feel, and need while avoiding blaming or accusing others. In contrast, “You-statements” blame the other person, put him/her on the defensive, and often cause communication to be blocked. To simplify things, we can use a kind of “formula” for I-statements:

“I feel/think/want (express the feeling/thought/desire)...
When (state the behavior causing it)...
Because (identify the reason)...”

The nice thing about this formula is that we can decide how much of it we want to use. It can be just the first one, or the first two lines, or all three.

**Responding to Others**

When other people are expressing themselves, it is not appropriate to use I-statements when responding. A more effective technique is called “Reflection.” Reflection is saying back, in your own words, the content and/or feeling of what the other person just said. Reflection does not question, challenge, argue, approve, or disapprove. We can use an even simpler formula for reflection:

“Sounds like you’re feeling/thinking/wanting (express the emotion, thought, desire you hear)…”

Because (state the reason you heard for it)...”

Reflection requires us to listen very carefully to what the other person is actually saying.