



## Effective and Constructive Feedback

Feedback allows learners to examine their professional performance, both strengths and areas for development, and make an action plan for improvement. It also promotes reflective practice, self-reflection and self-assessment, which are vital traits for lifelong learning.

Feedback should be non-judgmental, based on observed and specific behaviors, include positive and constructive feedback, and promote self-assessment. Feedback is about what is observed and not about offering advice. Non-specific feedback is unhelpful to learners, e.g. “great job.” Constructive feedback helps identify solutions for areas of weakness by looking at “what can be improved” rather than focusing on “what is wrong.”

The way feedback is given is crucial. A supportive learning environment and mutually-agreed goals/expectations should be established (See Supportive Learning Environment Handout). Feedback should address the learner’s individual needs and be limited to the amount of information the learner can use rather than to what the teacher might want to give.

### Suggested steps for giving feedback

- 1) *Organizing observations to share with learners:* At the end of the session, give yourself a few minutes to organize your observations. Select two or three strengths of the learner’s performance, as well as two or three high priority issues that the learner should work on. Think through your suggestions for improvement before sharing them with the learner.
- 2) *Learner Self-assessment:* Start by having the learner share with you how s/he thinks the learning event went. This approach encourages a habit of self-assessment, and gives you an idea about the learner’s level of awareness of her/his strengths, weaknesses and plans for improvement.
- 2) *Reinforcing learner strengths:* Highlight what the learner performed well (strengths). For example, “I noticed that when you addressed the patient’s concerns, she appeared relieved.”
- 3) *Suggestions for improvement:* Share the high priority issues you identified and provide the learner with suggestions for improvement. For example, “In your history taking I noticed that you took shortcuts that saved you time and effort, but led you to miss important diagnostic information. For example, when a patient complains of cough and you are concerned about TB, you must not only ask about possible exposures but also about risk factors for immunosuppressive diseases such as HIV.”
- 4) *Learner self-improvement plan:* Ask the learner what s/he would like to work on or learn more about in order to refine/raise her/his professional performance.

### Helpful Feedback Tips

- Communicate a sincere interest in seeing the learner improve her/his professional performance.
- Be in an appropriate setting; the location should be sufficiently private so that the learner feels relaxed and comfortable to express him or herself openly and honestly without embarrassment.

- Offer feedback periodically throughout a course/rotation. The learner should understand that this feedback is intended to promote their progress rather than establishing their grade.
- Requests for feedback can be initiated by the learner as well as by the teacher. The learner should actively solicit feedback.
- The learners might not recognize the information they receive during an ongoing feedback. The teachers could explicitly identify the encounter as feedback, for example “Let’s take a few minutes so that I can give you some feedback.”
- Highlight effective skills a learner has used occasionally, and then suggest ways for using such skills more often. For example, “When you summarized the patient’s symptoms you clearly showed the patient you were listening. What do you think would have happened if you had done that when you moved on to discuss management?”
- Focus the feedback in more detail if the learner gives a general description.
- Avoid hearsay and feeling rushed while giving feedback.
- Check with the learner whether or not he or she has understood the feedback correctly.
- A good question for the teacher to ask at the end of the day is, “Have I given my trainees any feedback today?”

### **References**

Quilligan, S. Communication skills teaching: the challenge of giving effective feedback. *The Clinical Teacher*. 2007; 4:100-105.

Vickery A, Lake F. Teaching on the run tips 10: giving feedback. *The Medical Journal of Australia*. 2005; 183 (5): 267-268

Bienstock, J., Katz, N., Cox, S., Hueppchen, N., Erickson, S. and Puscheck, E. To the point: medical education reviews-providing feedback. *American Journal of Obstetric & Gynecology* June 2007; 508-513.