

Tips for Providing Effective and Constructive Feedback

Feedback is a critical component of medical education by helping learners to understand where they stand in relation to the desired goals and objectives needed for their professional growth. However, it is not always easy to give, especially when it is negative and when learners may perceive feedback as a criticism instead of the educational intervention designed to enhance their learning. For these reasons, it is important for instructors to learn how to effectively give feedback, which is a skill and can be developed and improved.

Reflect on those instances when negative feedback was given to you by a skilled educator. You likely valued it and learned from the interaction. However, think of those times when the feedback was not provided in a helpful way – maybe it was inadvertently given in the wrong place or in front of the wrong people and you found it humiliating, maybe it was intended to belittle you simply because the instructor lacked tact or was having a bad day – use your experiences as a guide for giving feedback to your students.

Remember, feedback is designed to help learners grow and not to as a tool for punishment.

Creating a Learning Environment for Giving Feedback

1. *Inform the learners to expect feedback – both positive and negative – to help them develop their skills and knowledge while under your supervision*
 - By setting this expectation learners are less likely to perceive feedback as a criticism
2. *Establish clear goals and objectives for learning activity or rotation*
 - Clarify throughout the activity or rotation, as necessary
3. *Gather objective data regarding knowledge and skills of the learner*
 - This will help you to appropriately measure performance against what he/she should know and against his/her peers
4. *Ensure ample opportunity to observe/supervise the learner*
 - Feedback must be based on first-hand knowledge
5. *Consider timing - feedback needs to be given as soon as possible after the observed behavior (especially when it is negative)*
6. *Provide feedback in non-threatening environment*
 - If possible, provide negative feedback in a private setting
 - However, if the feedback is required immediately then ensure it is constructive and not a personal attack

Components of Effective Feedback (whether it is positive or negative)

1. Make it descriptive, not judgmental
 - Descriptive: *"When I first paged you regarding your patient in room #241, you should have called me immediately."*
 - Judgmental: *"It is clear that you think my pages are not important."*
2. Be specific, not general
 - Specific: *"When you are with a patient, I would like for you to listen more carefully when the patient asks you a question. The answer that you gave Ms. Jones did not correctly answer her question. She asked . . ."*
 - General: *"You need to learn how to communicate with your patients."*
3. Focus on changeable behaviors rather than the individual
 - Behavior: *"You need to allow the patient an opportunity to express her thoughts and not only be concerned about telling her your thoughts on her condition."*
 - Individual: *"You talk way too much!"*
4. Emphasize consequences
 - *"By not addressing a patient's medication concerns, you increase the chance of them not continuing the medication when they go home."*
5. Be Timely
 - Try to provide feedback as close to the demonstrated behavior as possible.
 - Focus on correcting the problem immediately then go into detail in a more private setting, if necessary.
 - Don't continue to rehash the mistake.
6. Based on first hand information (*not hearsay*)
 - You cannot provide effective feedback on behavior that you have not observed or knowledge that you have not questioned. This is not fair to the learner and it will make you look uninformed as the instructor - especially if the information that you received is incorrect.

How to Give Feedback

1. Observe the learner
2. State the constructive purpose of your feedback
3. Describe specifically what you observed
4. Wait, wait, wait for learner's response
 - Response may provide you insight into the problem
5. Offer specific suggestions on how to improve
 - Be specific and be clear
6. Summarize to avoid misunderstandings
7. Don't overwhelm the learner with too much information at once
8. Arrange for a retry, if possible

Coach, don't judge!!!

Feedback Pearls*

- Feedback must be useful information, delivered appropriately to a receptive learner in an environment that encourages the learner to change.
- Feedback must make sense to the learner so he/she can incorporate it into future performance.
- Feedback provides information, not judgments.
- Feedback on something done well aims to reinforce the behavior or even improve it further.
- Feedback on something done poorly is carefully presented to enable the learner to realize how to improve his/her performance.

* Observation and Feedback. Strategies in Clinical Teaching Website; University of Kansas School of Medicine - Wichita

[URL: <http://wichita.kumc.edu/strategies/observation/pearls.html>]