



#### **Resource 4: Seeking feedback from people who need care and support in more challenging situations**

A review of the way that NQSWs currently seek feedback on their practice indicates that there are some situations where people find seeking feedback more challenging:

- Where there are communication challenges
- Where there is significant conflict
- Where there are situations of crisis and high levels of emotion
- Where the work is short term in nature.

Since these situations are common in social work it is important that practitioners do seek feedback in these situations.

#### **KEY POINTS**

##### **Key challenges**

There are a number of central themes that create challenges to seeking feedback in these situations:

- Relationships might be challenged which can lead practitioners to assume that feedback will be either difficult to obtain or negative in nature
- The key stakeholders may lack confidence in gathering feedback in more challenging situations
- There may be concerns that seeking feedback in such situations is inappropriate and demonstrates a lack of awareness of the challenges
- Organisational culture may not reflect the need to gather feedback in more challenging situations.

##### **Useful approaches**

In many ways the most effective strategies to address the challenges posed by these situations are very similar:

- Take a critically reflective approach to seeking and using feedback
- Be creative – use the creativity skills you have developed in practice with particular respect to communicating in a personalised manner
- Recognise the value of informal feedback – which is often the most effective way to gather feedback in more challenging situations
- Work in partnership to ensure that everyone involved is clear on what information is required and why.

## **Seeking feedback when there are communication challenges**

Communication is a complex two-way process. Practitioners can face communication challenges in working with people in a range of situations, for example:

- Where a person has English as a second language
- Where a person has no or limited verbal communication
- A range of conditions and circumstances can lead to difficulties in communication – including dementia, brain impairment, learning disability, mental health issues, sensory impairment, etc.

These communication challenges may impact on the practitioner seeking feedback from the person who needs care and support. It is important not to avoid seeking feedback in these situations but to look at how feedback can be obtained using a variety of approaches.

Seeking feedback from people where there are communication challenges can in itself demonstrate a commitment to effective communication and an ability in communicating where there are challenges.

### **The particular challenges**

Where people have specific communication needs, general methods for seeking feedback may not be accessible (for example, a questionnaire may exclude a significant number of people).

### **Useful approaches**

- Recognise that it will take time to establish communication but this is never time wasted.
- NQSWs should investigate how others communicate with the person and how this can be built on to facilitate communicating feedback.
- Ongoing “feedback notes” based on observations by both the worker and their assessor should be kept.
- Prompt cards can be developed using a range of communication tools as appropriate to the person’s needs.
- Photographs and images may be used to generate feedback.
- Recognise that communication is individual and that people’s communication styles may change over time.
- Core questions can be developed and translated into a range of languages and communication formats.
- Cultural competence should be employed in seeking obtaining feedback. For example, establishing a person’s expectations before seeking feedback can be useful since expectations can be culturally defined.
- Draw on core communication skills in obtaining feedback.

## **Seeking feedback in conflict situations**

Social workers regularly encounter conflict in their work. For example, there may be particular conflict in the following situations:

- Where there are issues of safeguarding concerns
- Conflict between the worker and the person who needs care and support
- There is conflict between the person who needs care and support and their carers (as distinct from care workers) or formal support networks
- Conflict between different professionals.

Where there are situations of conflict a practitioner may not seek feedback because they are concerned that the feedback will be negative.

Seeking feedback from people where there is conflict can in itself demonstrate conflict competence and a commitment to reflection and learning from a whole range of situations. Where there are situations involving conflict feedback is by no means always negative. Even where feedback is negative this can be useful to balance feedback which is positive but doesn't necessarily give the worker anything to build on.

## **The particular challenges**

- Conflict can impact on the person and obtaining their perspective may be more difficult.
- The feedback may focus more on the outcome rather than on the worker's practice.
- Working relationships may have suffered as a result of the conflict.
- The worker may lack confidence in seeking feedback where there is conflict.
- The person who needs care and support may lack confidence in giving feedback where there is or has been conflict.
- The culture of an organisation can impact on willingness to obtain feedback in situations where there has been conflict.

## **Useful approaches**

- Recognise that situations of conflict can provide learning and conflict can be a positive force.
- Feedback to be obtained on a frequent basis (little and often) to establish a partnership approach from the start.
- Partnership agreement / contract of expectations.
- Going back to the person after critical reflection.
- Request for feedback should be provided at the very start of engagement.

## **Seeking feedback at times of crisis and high emotions**

Social workers regularly work in crisis situations which often involve high levels of emotion. Particular examples include:

- Supporting a person at the end of their life
- Situations involving safeguarding concerns
- Significant change which impacts on a person's quality of life
- Domestic violence
- Mental health (particularly where a person has experienced a deprivation of liberty through a section of the Mental Health Act).

NQSWs may be reluctant to seek feedback in these situations for a range of reasons. They may feel that they do not want to "burden" the person with a request at such a difficult time in their lives, they may feel that the request is insensitive, they may be concerned that the feedback will not be balanced because of the crisis situation, etc.

## **The particular challenges**

- Immediacy of the state of the emotion.
- Seeking feedback could detract from the event and indicate a lack of concern for the person and their situation.
- The person being supported needs to make an informed choice about giving feedback – this may be compromised at times of high emotion.

## **Useful approaches**

- In crisis, think about whether there are others who can give you feedback.
- Be clear about why feedback is being gathered at that time.
- Encourage a feedback discussion about how the worker handled the crisis after the crisis has dissipated.
- Be clear about what information is needed.
- Recognise the vital importance of emotional intelligence in social work and see seeking feedback in these situations as promoting learning around emotional intelligence.

## **Seeking feedback about short term intervention**

Increasingly, social workers are involved with people needing care and support on a very short term basis. They may see such a person only on one occasion. In these circumstances social workers may feel that it is difficult to obtain meaningful feedback.

NQSWs may be reluctant to seek feedback when they have had limited contact with the person for a range of reasons – not least because they may feel that they have not had the time to develop a relationship with them.

### **The particular challenges**

- The individual may not have formed a particular view of the social worker.
- The person may not recall the name of the worker.

### **Useful approaches**

- Recognise that informal feedback might be particularly useful in short term intervention.
- Chose very specific questions designed to illicit feedback on the areas that are most important.
- Attach a photograph of the worker to any request for feedback.
- Be clear about what information is needed and why.