



Department
for Education



Resource 5 – Guidance on receiving feedback

Giving feedback in a constructive way is a skill. Receiving feedback in a constructive way is probably an even more complex skill. In developing the skill of receiving feedback the following pointers might assist you.

Maintain an open attitude

Don't be defensive or 'defend' yourself. This may sound easy, but in practice it isn't easy to do. If you find yourself feeling defensive about a piece of feedback, you need to remind yourself that the reality is that a defensive reaction to feedback generally results from the feedback being accurate!

Employ your active listening skills

Listen actively, look at the person providing feedback and maintain an open body language.

Clarify the feedback

Ask any questions you need to in order to make sure you understand the feedback.

Recognise the giver of the feedback

Providing feedback is not an easy task. The person providing feedback is likely to have put a great deal of thought into the feedback. It takes a great deal of time and effort to provide thoughtful feedback. It is advisable to thank the person giving you feedback – just something like “You've really given me something to think about there. Thanks”, which not only demonstrates your commitment to learning but also helps you to maintain that vital positive and open attitude.

Write down the feedback

Try to write down what you can remember of what was said as soon as possible. You will find this assists with your reflection later.

Don't take criticism personally

Feedback is a professional process. Recognise that part of being a professional is learning from how others perceive you.

Recognise learning

Remember that simply because someone has picked up on an area of your practice which can be improved, this does not mean you are not a good social worker. Even the very best worker can improve on some aspect of their practice.

Reflect

If some aspect of the feedback puzzles you, take some time to reflect. How might the person's perception have been formed?

Focus

Make sure that you are not distracted so that you can focus fully on the feedback. Stay "in the moment" and try to truly understand the meaning behind the feedback. Try to avoid framing a response in your mind until you have heard all of the feedback.

Recognise your reactions

Notice your own reactions and how the feedback is making you feel. Sometimes it helps to partially disassociate yourself and imagine you are a 'fly on the wall' witnessing feedback being given to someone else. This can help you to think the feedback through objectively, rather than emotionally.

In receiving feedback, people take either a negative (closed) style or a positive (open) style. The following table summarises this:

Negative / closed	Positive / open
Defensive: defends actions. Disagrees with feedback	Open: listens without frequent interruption or objections
Attacking: turns the table on the person providing the feedback	Responsive: willing to truly "hear" what is being said
Denies: refutes the accuracy or fairness of the feedback	Accepting: accepts the feedback and reflects on how it can be used
Disrespectful: devalues the person giving the feedback	Respectful: recognises the value of the feedback
Closed: ignores the feedback	Engaged: interacts appropriately seeking clarification where required
Rationalising: finds explanation for the feedback that dissolves personal responsibility	Thoughtful: tries to understand the personal behaviour and practice that has led to the feedback
Inactive listening: makes no attempt to understand the meaning of the feedback	Active listening: listens attentively and tries to understand the meaning of the feedback
Superficial: listens and agrees but does not reflect and act on the feedback	Sincere: genuinely wants to learn from the feedback and reflect on how it can be used to improve practice

When feedback is difficult

Receiving negative feedback can be difficult for a range of reasons. However, it is vital that social workers receive honest feedback throughout their career and use it to enhance their practice. In discussing negative feedback with your assessor the following might be useful for you.

What do I do if I disagree with the feedback?

If you disagree with the feedback then:

- Ask your assessor if they have specific detailed examples
- Clarify each other's version of the feedback and have an open mind
- If you still disagree about the facts then you should discuss together as to what action will be taken in order to explore this further or how agreement can be reached
- Clarify exactly what you need to do about the feedback – what is expected of you in terms of action?

What do I do if I feel upset by the feedback?

Receiving negative feedback can be really hard, so if you feel upset:

- Try not to get angry as this will not help you and it can indicate a lack of respect for the person who has provided the feedback. Take a break, and don't worry about crying as it can relieve stress
- Talk about why you find the feedback upsetting
- Try not to put off discussing the feedback. Try to move on instead to finding solutions with your assessor which will end the session on a positive note.