



Department
for Education



Tool 4: Using GEMS questions in seeking feedback on social work practice

Very often simple information questions are used in seeking feedback from people who need care and support. Whilst these are useful, taking a solution-focused approach to developing the questions to be used in seeking feedback can be helpful. This resource explains GEMS question techniques and prompts the reader to consider how they might be able to use GEMS questions to both seek and reflect on feedback.

GEMS questions are drawn out of solution-focused approaches (de Shazer 1985). They can be particularly useful in generating feedback which promotes reflection and can provide ideas for the future development of practice. GEMS questions are made up of:

- Goal setting questions**
- Exception finding questions**
- Miracle questions**
- Scaling questions**

Understanding GEMS questions can be really useful in thinking about how to seek feedback from people who need care and support. They can assist the feedback process in a range of ways – for example, using some questions based on GEMS approaches can be useful in obtaining feedback. GEMS questions can also be useful to the NQSW and assessor in reflecting on the feedback gained.

Goal setting questions

Goal setting questions identify goals. Identifying what someone's goals for the work were can be very useful in establishing the context of any feedback obtained and then evaluating the feedback received. Using goal setting questions can also help to differentiate feedback about the particular worker from feedback about the social work process or the agency. Examples of goal setting questions to be used in gathering feedback include:

- What did you want the worker to support you with?
- What were you hoping the worker would do?

In reflecting on the feedback the worker can compare their thoughts with those of the person providing feedback by thinking through questions like:

- What are (were) you hoping to achieve?
- How will you know when our goals have been achieved?
- What outcomes are you looking for?

Exception finding questions

These questions help a person explore what strategies have worked for them in the past. The intention is to support someone to move away from a problem-focused narrative to a recognition of capabilities. Using questions such as these with a practitioner can help them to see what resources and strengths they have and can give the practitioner the confidence to apply their own strategies to resolve what they might see as an impossible situation. Exception finding questions are more likely to be used with practitioners to enable them to reflect on the feedback they have received and to help people to think about how they can use feedback to improve their practice. They may be less useful to use with people who need care and support in eliciting feedback, although examples of exception finding questions that could be used in gathering feedback include:

- You say that the worker seemed to have no idea what to do... Were there any points when they seemed more confident? Can you tell me what was different then?
- You say that the worker didn't help you in terms of..... Can you tell me what they could have done which would have been helpful to you?

Miracle questions

Widely used in social work practice, miracle questions can be useful in a range of ways. The following are examples of miracle questions which could be used to gather feedback:

- If you had a magic wand and could use it to improve the worker's practice what would you do with it?
- If you had three wishes about how the worker's approach could have been different what would they be?
- If you had a time machine and could go back to any stage of when the worker was involved in working with you, when would you go back to and what would you say that you wanted done differently?

Scaling questions

These can be particularly useful in gathering feedback and if the worker uses the same questions and scores themselves first then it can be useful to compare the scores. Examples include:

- On a scale of 1-10 how good are the worker's communication skills?
- On a scale of 1-5 how would you mark the worker's practice?

It is important to ensure that scaling questions are followed up with open questions like:

- Why would you give that score?
- You say you would give the worker a 7. What would it take for them to be a 10?

Reference

De Shazer, S. (1985) Keys to Solution in Brief Therapy. (New York) Norton