

Giving Feedback

(rev, 12/02/24)

Overview: One of the basic responsibilities of providing others with quality supervision is being able to effectively give feedback. Human Beings need feedback in order to grow and develop greater skills. However, it can be very difficult, and very stressful, to give others feedback.

Guidelines:

- Lead with humility.

There are two basic components to feedback. First, there's the actual *content* of the feedback. Second, there's the *delivery* of the feedback. You should be mindful that the content of your feedback may, or may not, be completely accurate. It's based on your limited observations and what's been passed along to you by others. Second, it's difficult to deliver feedback in a way that doesn't trigger defensiveness. Despite your best efforts, you'll have varying degrees of success in how you choose your words, your tone, and your body language.

An excellent technique for minimizing normal levels of defensiveness is to start out by acknowledging that your feedback may, or may not, be completely accurate, fair, or comprehensive. This sets the stage for you being open to the other person presenting their perspective. False confidence in your feedback only undermines your delivery.

Likewise, you can start by sharing your concerns that the feedback you're about to give may not be worded in the best way, may trigger a defensive reaction, or just may not be worded in a way that is as helpful as you hope it will be. This approach signals that the soon to follow feedback is intended to support a discussion. Clarification may be needed. Feedback is not a reprimand, and while some people may tend to receive it that way, you should try to be clear that such is not your intention. Feedback is an essential part of supporting professional development. Reprimands are part of a personnel action.

Sharing your emotional concerns about how the feedback will be received helps the other person feel like you're both on the same side. You're giving the feedback because your job includes trying to help them develop and excel at their job. It shows that you're open to feedback on how you did in giving them feedback. Again, although your roles are different, you're both on the same team.

- Show appreciation.

Direct-care work is extremely difficult, with late hours, a lot of competing demands for attention, and exposure to a lot of traumatic stress. Feedback should not only be about what could be done better but should also be about what was done really well.

- Focus on job performance, not on personality.
- Remember that all people have a need to save face. Give any critical feedback in private.
- Make it a conversation, not a one-way street.
- Make feedback a regular practice; don't wait for a formal performance review.
- Don't use "the sandwich approach" (positive feedback, corrective feedback, positive feedback), which has been shown to cause confusion and undercut constructive discussion.