

*Towards Terrific Tutoring  
School of Rehabilitation Science  
Occupational Therapy program  
McMaster University*

## GIVING FEEDBACK

ASSUMPTION: All people have some degree of the skills to give feedback

### BARRIERS

#### 1. LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

Strategy: Have criteria for feedback at fingertips and be familiar with it.

#### 2. Lack of Confidence.

Feelings of anxiety, you don't want to cause more harm than good, you don't want to appear not nice.

Strategy: Use techniques for giving feedback.

Practice, practice, practice.

Bring problems to tutors' meetings.

Get support and advice from mentor and tutors' meetings.

#### 3. Lack of forethought and planning.

Strategy: Plan approach and what you will say and how you will say it.

Practice in mirror and with others.

Role-play.

Say you need to go away and think about it.

#### 4. Lack of resources.

Strategy: Tutors' meetings.

Course coordinator.

Tutor doctor.

#### 5. Lack of Time.

Strategy: Set aside enough time and anticipate the amount of time it will take. Giving feedback implies accepting the responsibility to stay with the recipient as long as it takes to discuss and clarify this feedback.

## Additional Tips and Techniques for Giving Feedback

- Create a climate in which students can be open to feedback.

Strategy: Show interest in their learning vs evaluation.  
Develop a climate of trust by students seeing that the feedback will be supportive, positive as well as constructive and objective.  
Offer to share and work with the student for his or her benefit.  
Label subjective feedback.  
Show acceptance of what they say with physical cues as well as verbal.  
Role modelling of self-critique, accepting and seeking feedback.  
Explain when and how feedback will be given.  
Discuss criteria and expectations to be used in evaluation.

- Verify your perceptions and check out your hypothesis about the learner's performance.

Strategy: Verbalize your observations.  
Verbalize what is perceived. "You seem uncomfortable when you are giving feedback? Does that fit with the way you see things?"  
Encourage the student's description of his or her perceptions. "Tell me when you feel anxious?"  
"What is happening now?"

- Focus on behaviours that can be changed.

Strategy: Link feedback to actual observations and use specific examples.  
Limit feedback to 2-3 points.  
Link feedback to learning objectives.  
Encourage formulating of a plan of action.

- Take responsibility for the feedback.

Strategy: "I see that you are having some difficulty in this area." rather than "It seems that you are having difficulty in this area."

- Give learners the opportunity to practice self-critique.

Strategy: Invite it. Ask "What have you learned?"  
Let them practice and critique self-critique.  
Help them understand what they are critiquing.  
Help them identify what they did well.  
Help them identify what they need to work on and methods of improvement.  
Encourage formulation of his or her opinions and values. "What are your feelings in regard to...?"  
Encourage analysis of the quality of his or her experience. "Does this contribute to your discomfort?"

- Balance positive and negative feedback.

Strategy: Use the "sandwich" technique: positive-negative-positive.

- Frame negative critique as goals to be worked on.

Strategy: Be specific. Label the area while encouraging growth. "Perhaps one of your next goals might be to expand your techniques of searching for resources."

## SKILLS / TECHNIQUES ASSOCIATED WITH EMPATHY

SKILL / TECHNIQUE	STRATEGY
Attending, acknowledging	providing verbal or nonverbal awareness of student (eye contact).
Restating, paraphrasing	Responding to student's basic verbal message. Repeating the main idea expressed indicates the student has been understood.
Reflecting	Reflecting content, experiences or feelings that have been heard or perceived through cues. It directs questions, feelings, and ideas back to the student. This indicates that the student's opinion has value. Student: " I tried all day to get an OT and no one returned my call." Tutor: " That makes you feel frustrated. "
Interpreting	Offering a tentative interpretation about a student's feelings, desires, or meanings.
Summarizing, synthesizing	Bringing together the student's feelings and experiences; providing a focus. Indicates progress towards understanding. " Have I got this straight? " " You've said that..." " During the past hour we have discussed..."
Supportive questioning	Probing in a way that requests more information or attempts to clarify.
Supporting	Showing warmth and caring.
Accepting	Does not indicate agreement but is non-judgmental. Nodding. "Yes", "Uh hmmm" "I follow what you said"
Being quiet	Giving the student time to think as well as talk.
Encouraging comparison	Comparing ideas or experiences brings out recurring themes. "Was it something like...?"
Placing event in time or sequence	Clarifying the relationship of events. Important in identifying cause and effect relationships. " Was this before or after...?"



BEHAVIOURS/TECHNIQUES ASSOCIATED  
WITH  
BEING CRITICAL OR INHIBITATORY

BEHAVIOURS / TECHNIQUE	EXAMPLE
Denying feelings, perceptions, experiences.	" There is no reason to be upset, you're not that bad."
Advising, insisting, imposing.	" Well I think you should go there: it will be good for you"
Judging negatively or disapproving.	" You shouldn't have done it that way"
Diagnosing or explaining what's happening to the student.	" You only feel that way because you're upset about your grade"
Diverting, changing topic.	"Here look at this" "What about this new website?"
Giving false hope or inappropriate reassurance.	"I'm sure it will be alright" "You're coming along fine"
Making impersonal, stereotypic statements.	"It's for your own good" "You're a typical phys-ed graduate"
Focussing inappropriately on one's self.	"What that happened to me just the other day"
Interrogating.	"Why did you say that to her?"
Trivializing or belittling feelings expressed.	"Oh that's nothing to worry about" " Everybody feels that way"
Rejecting.	Showing contempt for student's ideas or behaviour. " Let's not discuss that interaction"
Disagreeing.	Implying the student is wrong and places him or her in a position of having to defend him or herself. " I don't believe that" "I disagree with that statement"
Indicating the existence of an external source.	Implies outside influence and encourages defensive behaviours. " Who told you that?" vs "What sources led you to draw those conclusions?"
Making interpretive statements.	Telling the student the meaning of his or her experience. 'What you really mean is...' "Unconsciously you're saying...?"

Adapted from the following  
References

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Knowles, M. Self Directed Learning. 1975

Lehner, G.P. Aids for Giving and Receiving Feedback. University Associates Publishers, Inc. 1975.

Westberg, J. & Jason, H. Clinical Teaching. The Center for Instructional Support, The University of Miami School of Medicine, 1988.

Basic Workshop on Therapeutic Techniques. Faculty of Continuing Education, Mohawk College of Applied Arts & Technology, 1986.

## Some Very Concrete Suggestions For Facilitation of Feedback in Tutorial

- Put students' learning objectives all on one page so that every group member has a copy to refer to for each session evaluation. The tutor's learning objectives should be included in this page, so they too can be used for constructive feedback. This is very good modelling.
- Each evaluation can be added onto the previous evaluation so that areas of change, progress and new directions for learning are clearly visible to the student and tutor. This is easily done with a computer disc. The final evaluation ends up having all comments and marks of all in tutorial evaluations.
- Include comments from all students on each evaluation or at least attach to the tutor's evaluation.