

JUST-IN-TIME TEACHING: Giving meaningful feedback

SCOPE: this guide is for you if you want to learn how to have feedback conversations with students. The guide focuses on verbal feedback in informal settings, (eg giving a student feedback after you have observed them examining a patient), however the same principles apply to more formal feedback conversations, (eg a supervisor giving a trainee feedback at the end of a clinical placement), and may also be extrapolated to written feedback.

TOP TIPS:

Top tip 1: Promote reflection, rather than delivering a judgement

Top tip 2: Plan and label feedback to develop feedback literacy

Top tip 3: Use the key principles of good feedback practice

Top tip 4: Consider using a structure: Pendleton's model can help

Top tip 5: Try 'Advocacy with Inquiry' if a student may lack insight

Top tip 6: Develop a culture of feedback

Top Tip 1: Promote reflection, rather than delivering a judgement

People do not necessarily change their behaviour simply because someone has told them to. An individual needs to feel motivated to change and this comes from a place within themselves. For a student to accept and assimilate feedback it needs to feel meaningful for them and to take account of their goals, (Ramani et al 2019).

Feedback should be student-centred. Students should ask for feedback, arrive at their own conclusions based on the discussion and develop action plans for development. In practice, some students may not be aware that they should lead the process or may lack confidence to do so. If this is the case, we need to support students to take a more active role.

Feedback needs to have the qualities of a dialogue, not a monologue: it should be like playing frisbee, rather than shot-put. With a shot-put, someone plans a good throw, delivers it and has no concern for it being caught. With a frisbee, two people throw back and forth in a manner that requires readiness, interaction, trust and accuracy.

Top Tip 2: Plan and label feedback to develop feedback literacy

We may think we give a lot of feedback, and that it is useful, but students can have a different perception, (van der Ridder et al 2008). Students receiving feedback often do not recognise it as such, (ibid), so it is helpful to explicitly label it. Telling students what feedback will look like, describing how and when it is likely to happen and inviting their opinions on this, can help. For example, when you first meet a student, you could say; “There will be lots of opportunities for feedback so let’s make the most of these. I like to think of ‘feedback conversations’, rather than ‘me giving you feedback’, so I think it would be good if you took the lead. There are lots of feedback models we could use, like Pendleton’s, (*describe this - see Top Tip 4 below*). Would that model be helpful, or is there another one you’re familiar with that you like?”

Top Tip 3: Use the key principles of good feedback practice

There are key principles to keep in mind during the information-giving components of feedback conversations. The table below is derived from Ende’s Principles (1983):

PRINCIPLE	EXAMPLE
Common goals	ask the student what they would like / need feedback on
Expected and timely	agree the time and place for feedback, (immediate is usually best, but a delay is better in some situations)
First-hand data	comment on what you have seen, not what others have seen
Limited quantity	focus on key points that will have most impact
Descriptive language	describe what you saw and heard
Specific	talk about specific examples, not generalisations
Communicated as subjective	avoid stating your opinion and perspective as if they are facts, (ie tell them that what you are saying is what <i>you think</i>)
Deal with actions	comment on what you see them do, not what you assume their motivations or intentions are

Top Tip 4: Consider using a structure: Pendleton’s model can help

There are many feedback models based on these principles. It is not necessary to use a model when having a feedback conversation, but they can provide a helpful structure. Good models promote student ownership of the process and have the qualities of a dialogue. Pendleton’s model (Pendleton et al 1984) below has specific steps:

PHASE	SAMPLE PHRASES
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1. Teacher prepares student, (check student wants feedback; choose time / place; agree subject; establish facts; get a sense of student's feelings)	"When suits you best to chat about this?"; "Anything particular you'd like to focus on?" "Let's review what happened: can you talk me through it?" "How did it seem/feel for you?"
2. Teacher asks student to say what they think went well	"Let's start with what were you most satisfied with – what would you say went well?"
3. Teacher says what they think went well	"I noticed that you did ... really well. I think that's because you did X before Y which was great because ..."
4. Teacher asks student to say what they think could be improved	"What about anything that you weren't so happy with or that you'd like to improve?"
5. Teacher says what they think could be improved	"I noticed ..., which made me wonder if What I think might work better in this situation is ..."
6. Negotiate what to improve	"What do you think your priorities should be now ...?" "I think you should focus on Y because..."
7. Co-create action plan	"Let's figure out how you could achieve these changes. How could you work towards X?"

Top Tip 5: Try 'Advocacy with Inquiry' if a student may lack insight

Many students will know where their strengths and difficulties lie however it is not uncommon for students to focus on the areas where they feel they are struggling and not to notice the things that they are doing well. On the flip side, there are students who may not be aware of areas where they need to improve: in reality this is uncommon but it can cause anxiety for the person teaching them.

Where you think a student is struggling to see some of their strengths or difficulties, an 'Advocacy with Inquiry' approach can help. This is a communication technique that combines stating one's own views, thoughts or feelings (advocacy) with asking questions (inquiry), to foster discussion and uncover the underlying views, thoughts or feelings of the other person. Below are examples. These may easily be incorporated into Pendleton's model.

"I thought you appeared at ease when ... - what you were thinking at that point?"
"You mentioned a sense of relief when ... - what do you think was going on there?"
"I thought you appeared a bit hesitant when ... - what was going through your mind?"

“You said you felt uncomfortable when ... - why do you think that was?”

Top Tip 6: Develop a culture of feedback

A culture of feedback is an environment where the giving and receiving of feedback is a normal, expected and valued part of daily life. It encourages open communication and honest conversations about performance and behaviour between everyone, regardless of their position in an organisation. It can foster a positive environment where everyone is learning and developing.

Help create a feedback culture in your workplace by inviting feedback from others, including those junior to you. In a workplace that is not used to this kind of practice, juniors may be surprised to be asked so it is important to try to put them at ease and to normalise the practice. You might say, “I’d really value your feedback about me - would that be OK? It might feel a bit strange giving feedback to someone senior but I think it’s good to develop this habit and I think your perspective, as a (eg Year 4 student), will be really valuable.” It is important to make the process simple. You could ask them to use Pendleton’s model and tell them the steps, or you could give them specific tasks eg “When you sit in on my clinic, please listen for / watch for ... that you personally like, and also what you would say / do differently”.

SUMMARY: Feedback can be a powerful tool for learning and development, when done well. For feedback to be accepted and assimilated by a learner, it needs to feel meaningful and to take account of their goals. Feedback should be student-centred and have the qualities of a dialogue that supports reflection. Telling students what you mean by feedback, and what it will look like, can enhance feedback literacy. Feedback models, such as Pendleton’s, provide structure. Key principles to bear in mind are: common goals, timely, balanced, first-hand data, limited, descriptive, specific. Advocacy with inquiry can help when a student lacks some insight. Cultivate a culture of feedback by asking for it yourself.

WHERE NEXT? This resource has been developed by the [Clinical Educator Programme](#) (CEP) in collaboration with NHS Lothian’s Medical Education Directorate (MED). The CEP is a free CPD programme for clinical educators in SE Scotland. For more on the themes discussed in this guide, you may like to register for the CEP Giving Effective Feedback course.



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