

DLTE

Department of
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Enhancement

SCHOOL OF HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE

Student Partnership Project

Making Connections with Feedback



This advice is offered by Edinburgh Napier University's School of Health & Social Care students giving advice to their colleagues on making the most of feedback on Clinical Placements. There are five cards in this series.

Thanks to Candice Cessford, Ursula Dugdale, Amy Reynolds and Iona Rodger for working in partnership with Associate Professor Liz Adamson, Professor Kay Sambell and Professor Sally Brown in producing these cards.



FIVE WAYS THAT STUDENTS CAN LEARN FROM EACH OTHER WHEN GOING OUT ON PLACEMENT

1. Use all feedback sources while on placement, including from your peers. Junior students learn a lot from observing and emulating experienced students' approaches to feedback.
2. Network with your fellow students while out on placement: be kind to yourself and each other, speaking openly and supportively.
3. Attend reflection sessions and take time to reflect together because hearing each other's stories can help you make sense of yours.
4. If you are having a negative placement experience, explain the situation to your peers and ask their advice.
5. Have someone else read/talk over the written/oral feedback you get while on placement so they can impartially discuss it with you. This way you can think through how best to move forward.



○ **HELPFUL QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK YOUR MENTOR TO HELP YOU GET USEFUL FEEDBACK**

When you are out on placement, it's not always easy to know what to do when you receive feedback, good or bad. These questions, based on ideas produced by students on your programme, might help you ask for the feedback you need and can use effectively:

- How do you think I am progressing? What do you think I am doing well? How could I further improve on that?
- What are the areas of my practice you think need most improvement? Am I working at the right level?
- In the [named areas] in which I am less confident, how could you help me improve?
- Where else could I gain support so I can keep improving?
- If you were in my shoes, how would you improve or change your practice?
- I feel I have done [named practical task] well. What do you think?
- Is there a time when we can take 10 minutes and talk somewhere privately? If not, when would be the best time to talk?



- To help me deal with the feedback I receive, can you tell me how you yourself interpret and respond to feedback?
- I have a specific area of interest in [named specialism] What would in your opinion be the best steps to proceed in that direction?
- Where can I find research evidence or other information to help me expand my knowledge and make improvements in my practice?

SOME ADVICE ON GAINING THE BEST POSSIBLE FEEDBACK FROM YOUR MENTORS

- Be keen and proactive in seeking feedback: the more you ask, the more you are likely to receive;
- Value the opinions of your mentor even if you disagree with them: listen to it carefully, be respectful and dignified in how you respond so you can learn from sometimes hard words;
- Question your own thoughts and actions out loud to your mentors and ask them to give you feedback on your ideas;
- If feedback is given to you very much in passing, ask for clarification of anything you don't understand, exploring both the positive and negative.

○ COMMON REACTIONS TO NEGATIVE FEEDBACK AND ADVICE ON HOW TO COPE WITH IT

Negative feedback when you are out on placement can be tough to take and can erode your confidence. Here are some of the most common reactions identified by students on your programmes, together with some advice on how to handle it. It's not unusual to respond by:

- becoming defensive and arguing;
- crying or otherwise responding emotionally;
- being in denial, refusing to believe the comments and ignoring them;
- simply not taking your mentor's comments on board, thereby ignoring the potential for personal and professional development;
- taking things excessively personally and assuming that you are entirely at fault;
- feeling as if there is nothing you can do about it, choosing to be stagnant in your response;
- dwelling excessively on negative feedback and allowing it to impact on your progression and mental health;
- failing to ask for feedback in the future because you fear the results.



MANAGING YOUR RESPONSES TO NEGATIVE FEEDBACK FROM YOUR MENTORS

- Start by acknowledging to yourself how bad it makes you feel.
- Ask clarifying questions so you can identify what the particular problems are.
- Avoid (if you can) being excessively emotional in your responses in front of patients, but don't be afraid to have a good cry in privacy.
- Seek advice and support from your peers.
- Remember that you could have caught your mentor on a bad day: it might not all be about you.
- Make sure you continue to seek feedback as the best way to improve.



FIVE AREAS TO NOTE WHEN WORKING WITH YOUR MENTOR BEDSIDE, SO THAT YOU DON'T LOSE SIGHT OF THEIR USEFUL FEEDBACK

1. Always carry a notebook on placement. Note down any in-the-moment feedback advice that's given, as well as anything you need to query (e.g. when it's not appropriate to discuss in front of a patient) and anything you need to research.
2. Ask for pointers about what you did well and record them too: don't just focus on what went wrong. That way you'll know what to keep doing, as well as things to avoid.
3. Remember, patient feedback is useful and important too, so actively seek it and reflect on it.
4. It's useful to discuss feedback with your mentor, but ask in a constructive manner e.g. 'Can you suggest how I might do x better next time?'
5. Listen out for little comments, and don't dismiss them. All feedback can help transform your practice.





FIVE USEFUL THINGS THAT YOU COULD/SHOULD DO WITH FEEDBACK

1. Remember that all feedback offers an opportunity for learning to occur. Ask yourself how you can use it to help you develop and progress.
2. Discuss your feedback with valued and trusted peers. Your colleagues can offer different perspectives. Talking it through may help you make better sense of your feedback and help you keep a sense of proportion.
3. Don't look at feedback as a negative process. Try to think of it as a means of facilitating your professional and personal growth.
4. Turn any negative feedback into an action plan for improvement. Seek support to decide your next steps.
5. Remember that you have lots to offer, so reflect on your strengths as well as your problem areas.



○ WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY...

Here are what some of the most widely cited scholars say about using feedback:

"Being assessed is undoubtedly an emotional experience. Having a judgment made about the quality of your work is potentially a humiliating experience" (Bryan & Clegg, 2006, p218)

"Students on the whole tend not to be good at doing anything constructive with the feedback we give them. Often, they ...give it at best very scant attention, fearing perhaps how distressing it might be." (Race, 2019)

"[We should] encourage students to think of feedback as a trigger to them taking action. If they become active in the use of the feedback we give them, rather than passive recipients of our comments, they are more likely to do better work in the future." (Sambell et al, 2018)

"Understanding why feedback is not always acted upon remains an important area for researchers. ... Findings suggested that emotional reactions play a significant part in determining how students will act on the feedback they receive" (Pitt and Norton, 2017 p.499)

"Modern thinking emphasises students' agency...and assumes that feedback requires plentiful and ongoing dialogues between staff and students (Sambell, et al, 2019)

"It is essential for us to understand not only how best to design and send the feedback 'message', but also how to influence the way students receive that message students' involvement, engagement, and implementation of feedback is crucial." (Winstone et al, 2017)



"For students to be feedback literate they need to:

- recognise that feedback information comes in different forms and from different sources;
- develop capacities to make sound academic judgments about their own work and the work of others;
- maintain emotional equilibrium and avoid defensiveness when receiving critical feedback;
- be proactive in eliciting suggestions from peers or teachers and continuing dialogue with them as needed;
- develop habits of striving for continuous improvement on the basis of internal and external feedback;
- take action in response to feedback information;
- develop a repertoire of strategies for acting on feedback." (Carless and Boud, 2018, p1319)

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Race, P. (2019) *The Lecturer's Toolkit*. (5th edn.) Routledge.

Sambell, K., Brown, S. and Race, P. (2018) *ENhance Guide Getting students to engage with feedback* Edinburgh Napier University <https://staff.napier.ac.uk/services/dlfe/Pages/QuickGuides.aspx>

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