

How to... give positive and helpful feedback

In our professional lives as Speech and Language Therapists we have to give (and receive) feedback on a daily basis. It is a core professional skill that you have many opportunities to develop and practise while you are at University.

Giving feedback may be helped by reflecting on your own experience in receiving feedback. Reflect on how you feel when given positive or encouraging feedback. Is there anything in how that feedback was given (style, content, key words) that rendered it particularly effective?

Remember that feedback is given and received as part of a dynamic relationship, so although there are tips on how to do it, you have to practise and reflect on the most effective and genuine way for you personally.

Here are some tips to help you with the when, what and how of giving positive and helpful feedback.

- The more immediate the feedback (i.e. close to the event you are describing), the more helpful it will be
- A good starting point for giving feedback is to ask the client to self evaluate i.e. give you some feedback as to what they think of their own performance. This is particularly helpful if you are struggling to find something positive to say about a client's performance.
- Be descriptive and not judgemental: be accurate, simple, clear and specific
- Direct praise or criticism towards performance in behavioural terms, i.e. to what the person did rather than who they are (avoid labelling people)
- Be fair and reasonable, support judgements with evidence from observations
- The majority of feedback should be positive, negative feedback should only be given if you have a sound rationale for doing so
- Offer constructive criticism only for actions which can be changed, and are related to the goal or activity you are engaged in
- Don't compare the person's behaviour with that of others
- Restrict feedback to what can be absorbed and understood at one time
- When a client is beginning to master a new skill you might give them feedback *every* time they demonstrate it, gradually reducing feedback as they gain confidence

How to deliver feedback in a positive way:

Be supportive: Deliver feedback in a non-threatening and encouraging manner

Be direct: The focus of the feedback should be clear

Be sensitive: Deliver feedback with sensitivity to the needs of the other person

Be considerate: Feedback should never insult, demean or humiliate

Be descriptive: Describe what the person has done that is good so that they know exactly what to do again

Be specific: focus feedback on specific behaviours, you may need to select which behaviours you want to give feedback on and which you want to ignore

Be timely: Give feedback as close as possible to the event, in therapy this is usually immediately afterwards

Be thoughtful: Give considered feedback that is meaningful to the other person

Be helpful: Give feedback that will help the person progress