

# Preceptor News

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## Strategies to Decrease Fears of Providing Feedback

**Adopt a growth mindset:** When you believe people can improve through effort and feedback, it can help reduce anxiety around providing feedback. Think of it as a tool to help your preceptee grow, which makes the process feel more positive. The role of feedback is not "Gotcha," but instead "I got ya!"

**Practice empathy:** Acknowledge their efforts and use supportive language. A key component to providing effective feedback is focusing on the issue, not the person; otherwise, it can feel like an attack.

**Review effective feedback techniques:** The DESC model is a communication tool that provides clear, constructive feedback and improves communication while building trust. This involves *describing* the behavior, listing the *effects* of the behavior, outlining the *solution*, and defining the *consequences*. (AHRQ, 2023)

**Plan for the conversation:** Consider how the preceptee may feel and how best to approach the situation. Ensure that the feedback is given promptly, privately and is limited to remediable behaviors.

**Focus on the outcome:** When done correctly, feedback can lead to improvement. So, instead of focusing on the initial discomfort, focus on the long-term outcomes it can bring.

**Role play:** Practice, practice, practice. Consider practicing the techniques with co-workers, friends or family until they become second nature.

## Feedback Without Fear

Feedback is a crucial aspect of health care education, serving as a foundation for learning and professional development. However, many preceptors experience a fear of providing feedback often due to concerns about damaging relationships, hurting feelings, being perceived as overly critical or simply causing conflict. This fear can impede preceptee development, negatively affecting the quality of care the preceptee is able to provide. Therefore, addressing preceptors' fear of giving feedback is essential for fostering a culture of growth, learning and improvement in health care.

## The Importance of Feedback

Feedback provided to preceptees in health care settings is essential for several reasons.

- **Enhances Skill Development:** Constructive feedback helps students and new employees identify areas for improvement, promoting clinical competence.
- **Promotes Self-Reflection:** Receiving regular feedback encourages learners to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses, fostering continuous self-improvement.
- **Ensures Patient Safety:** Feedback that corrects errors or improves performance directly contributes to better patient outcomes, ensuring safer and more effective health care.

Despite these benefits, many preceptors need help delivering genuine and constructive feedback. Unfortunately, the fear of causing harm or conflict can lead to watered-down, vague or confusing feedback, limiting its educational value.

## Reinforcing Feedback Is Still Feedback

Reinforcing feedback can be a valuable tool for helping your preceptee identify and "reinforce" their strengths and improve motivation. This type of feedback highlights what they are doing well, encouraging them to keep doing it. Behavior that gets rewarded (through reinforcing feedback) gets repeated. This type of feedback also can strengthen the preceptor/preceptee relationship by building trust and fostering respect. Lastly, reinforcing feedback also improves engagement, leading to greater dedication to their work. This can help decrease burnout and intent to leave.

**"We all need people who will give us feedback. That's how we improve."  
– Bill Gates**

## References:

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (2023). Tool: DESC. <https://www.ahrq.gov/teamstepprogram/curriculum/mutual/tools/desc.html>

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