

# PROVIDING FEEDBACK

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# providing feedback

## Introduction

Feedback is an important part of the effective functioning of groups and it is an essential facilitation technique.

Giving and receiving feedback as a facilitator helps to create a climate of trust and mutual support in the group, but it is not solely the prerogative or responsibility of the facilitator. Feedback can take many forms. It can be critical comment or positive acknowledgment. But to be effective feedback must be given and received in context, ie it must be appropriate in the environment of the group,

In the following windows we explore the purpose of feedback, when to use it, and how to use effectively. We outline some possible pitfalls and provide suggestions for good practice including a list of 'what if scenarios' which serve as a check list for facilitators to review and reflect on their own practice.

## 11.1 The role of feedback

# providing feedback

Providing feedback is an important group technique and an essential facilitation skill. Good facilitators give and receive feedback. They provide it to individuals and to the group and they ask for it from the group. The opportunity to give one another honest feedback and respond to it is an important way for a group to bond more closely together. Feedback is an important way of:



## 11.2 Types of feedback

Feedback can take many forms. It can be a group discussion, individual's opinions, ideas or comments. It can be given to individuals or to a whole group.

Feedback can be formal or informal, verbal or non-verbal. It can be immediate or delayed.

Feedback can take the form of critical comment or positive acknowledgment.

Feedback can be:

- ! facilitator to group
- ! facilitator to individuals in the team/group
- ! group members to facilitator
- ! group members to each other

Feedback describes behaviour rather than judging it.

Feedback is structured so that it is specific, balanced and timely.

To be effective feedback must be in context, and the context includes the dynamics of the group. Not solely being the prerogative of the facilitator, it should allow everyone to respond to everyone else, in a climate of trust and mutual support. The facilitator can model this by seeking feedback reinforcing the sense that the group is a safe place to give and receive feedback.

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## 11.3 Hot tips and pitfalls

### HOT TIPS

- ⚡ Consider the emotional state and receptivity of group members
- ⚡ Include feedback as a formal part of the group agenda
- ⚡ Ask directly for ideas, opinions and comments
- ⚡ Encourage response to feedback
- ⚡ Actively promote discussion where views differ and model the giving and receiving of feedback with the group
- ⚡ Establish group agreement on how feedback will operate
- ⚡ Take all feedback as genuine.

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## 11.3 *continued* Hot tips and pitfalls

### PITFALLS

- Lack of time
- Failing to allow others to respond to feedback
- Fear of:
  - making others feel uncomfortable
  - not knowing where to start or what to say
  - being challenged
  - being disliked
  - creating a situation that you cannot control
  - giving feedback to a supervisor or manager
  - appearing to criticise colleagues
  - not having the skills
- Being vague or non-specific with feedback
- Being long winded
- Avoiding feedback
- Failing to follow up on group feedback
- Uncertainty about the purpose of feedback.

## 11.4 What If...? some scenarios



**The group doesn't participate or provide the information you need.**

Ask for what is required. Ask specifically for ideas or comments. Allow people time to respond to your feedback. Don't jump in to fill up the silence.



**Everyone talks at once and no-one seems to listen, or individuals push their own agenda.**

Articulate the problem and ask for suggestions as to how this could be handled. Say that it is the responsibility of each participant to find a way to be heard, or refer to the ground rules.



**Participants are defensive when you provide feedback.**

Be aware that when receiving feedback people's emotions may be affected. Avoid evaluative language. This way you will reduce the need for individuals to react defensively.



Remember feedback should describe rather than judge or interpret.

**Participants want direction from the facilitator rather than participating or getting involved themselves.**

Encourage greater involvement by breaking into smaller groups, where individuals have more chance of being heard and may be less intimidated.



**Feedback from others doesn't match your perceptions.**

Facilitators must listen to feedback. If one person expresses a view it is likely that there are others who share this view. Schedule into your session some time to respond to group feedback and show participants that you are prepared to take notice of and act on their feedback.

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## 11.4 *continued* What If ... ? some scenarios



**People want to sidetrack the discussion or discuss irrelevant issues.**

Point out that the discussion is “off-track” and suggest postponing it to a more suitable time.



**People talk in a long winded and rambling way.**

Frequently summarise what they are saying and ask direct questions that channel the person to be more concise.



**People are vague.**

Ask them to articulate specific points. Ask for more detail or more information.



**People are aggressive or excessively critical.**

Show empathy. Let the person know that you understand their viewpoint. Use strategic questioning to bring out the issue. Remember that ideas for improvement often come out of constructively critical feedback.



**People say only what they think others expect to hear.**

Explain clearly that what you want is honest and open communication and encourage reflective activities.

You might choose to take an opposing position to the one you originally took, or to the one you think the participants expect you to take.