Guidelines for Giving Peer Feedback

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Introduction

Giving and receiving feedback are important skills for social work students to develop. Peer feedback is a valuable tool in learning communication skills as it helps to identify strengths in skill development and possible areas for future development. Unfortunately, many of us associate feedback with criticism. Meaningful learning experiences require a caring, open environment where students feel comfortable to offer honest feedback and to receive it. These guidelines will assist students in how to give and receive meaningful feedback to enhance their development of communication skills in Social Work 310A.

Constructive Feedback

Constructive feedback is information about our developing skills that can be used by the learner to improve their skill development.

Constructive feedback has the following characteristics:

Specific: Feedback that targets specific skills and actions are more helpful than general comments that may be confusing.

Descriptive: Feedback that describes behavior rather than evaluates or judges actions (good or bad) is more helpful.

Behavioral: Feedback that focuses on what a person is doing rather than guesses at what they are thinking is more effective.

Balanced: Feedback should include both positive feedback as well as suggestions for improvement.

Manageable: Feedback should target one or two specific skills rather than overload a person with too much information.

Changeable: Feedback is directed toward behavior that the learner can change.

Solicited: Feedback is most effective when the learner has invited it.

Timely: Feedback is most helpful when it is delivered directly after a practice session so the learner can connect their practice with the feedback.

Checked: The learner and observer should ensure clear communication by checking the receiver's understanding of the feedback.

Tips for giving verbal feedback:

1) Focus first on the positive.

2) Focus on what you observed, or felt rather on why you think it happened.

3) Use statements such as "less effective" or "more effective" rather than "good" or "bad".

4) "I" statements are helpful when giving feedback (e.g " I felt confused when you asked that question").

 Tips for receiving verbal feedback:

1) Listen to all of the feedback before asking questions or clarifying meaning.

2) Paraphrase what you heard.

3) Ask for specifics if you are unclear about the feedback.

4) Acknowledge the person who gave you the feedback for their effort and suggestions.

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Feedback for Specific Skills (Term 1) :

The following are the areas of communication skill development that you can provide feedback on in 310A:

1) **Engagement**

- smiles at the client, engages in small talk to put the client at ease, offers water, etc.

2) **Introduction**

- gives an appropriate introduction of themselves, identifies their preferred pronouns and asks client their preferred pronouns and name
- Introduces the agency in which they work, describes services offered by their agency

3) **Confidentiality Explanation**

- clearly explains the limits to absolute confidentiality, asks the client if they have any questions about the limits and can clearly answer any questions or concerns about confidentiality

4) **Relationship Contracting**

- discusses the client's understanding of counselling and offers a clear definition of counselling if necessary
- discusses ways that the client and social worker can best work together including areas such as communication styles, exploration of how differences might help or hinder relationship, roles and expectations of both client and counsellor

5) **Work Contracting**

- discusses length of session, possible meeting places, frequency of sessions, fees, payment methods etc.
- discusses the focus of the individual session (sessional contracting) and the focus of the work together given agency context ("What has brought you to counselling today?")

6) **Body Language and Attending Behavior**

- maintains open, relaxed, and confident posture with appropriate eye contact
- leans forward slightly (if possible) to show interest
- uses head nods and body gestures to encourage client to talk

7) **Core Conditions (empathy, genuineness and unconditional positive regard)**

- smiles appropriately to convey warmth and trust
- tone of voice, pacing, body and verbal language conveys interest in understanding the other's perspective
- body language and verbal language match to convey genuineness
- non-judgemental body and verbal language conveys acceptance of the client for who they are

8) **Use of Silence**

- allows the client appropriate amounts of time to think and respond to questions
- takes appropriate amount of time to form a question or response; can attend and be silent when the client is experiencing difficult feelings; can give permission for silence appropriately

9) **Paraphrasing**

- engages in brief, accurate, and clear re-phrasing of the content of what the client has expressed
- If phrases have been repeated or parroted , it has been done for a purpose

10) **Summarizing**

- makes statements at key moments in the session that capture the overall sense of what the client has been expressing;
- is able to capture themes in the client's discussion and reflect this back in a few concise sentences

11) **Simple Encouragers and Directives**

- uses verbal prompts (uh huh, okay, right, yes) as well as simple statements (go on, tell me more, etc.) to encourage the client to keep talking and let them know they are heard

12) **Immediacy**

- recognizes their own, or the client's here-and-now feelings and addresses them to explore, evaluate or deepen the counseling relationship

13) **Humor**

- uses humor purposefully to build relationship, puts the client at ease or reduces tension appropriately

14) **Self Disclosure**

- personal opinions, information, feelings or experiences are expressed purposefully to normalize the client's feelings or experiences and are for the client's benefit

15) **Empathic Responses (invitational, basic and inferred)**

- asks directly about feelings (invitational)
- accurately and specifically names feelings the client has communicated with appropriate intensity (basic)
- identifies client's feelings based on nonverbal and indirect cues (inferred empathy)
- stays on the emotional level and explores feelings in greater detail once identified

16) **Use of Questions (open, closed, indirect)**

- used to encourage the client to elaborate on issue
- asks closed ended questions to confirm specific information or to narrow a topic
- uses statements as questions ("I'm curious about" or "I wonder if you have considered") to seek information in a less direct way (indirect)
- uses a variety of question types interspersed with other skills so the client does not feel interrogated

Feedback for Specific Skills (Second interview Include all of the above and the following) :

17) **Demonstrates empowerment and strengths based practice**

- helps client identify strengths, resiliencies
- highlights undervalued skills and capacities
- inquires about client's hopes, goals
- fosters hope and optimism

18) **Moving into action planning and goal setting**

- helps client change a need into a specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely goal

- helps client brainstorm strategies and move into acting on them and evaluating them

19) **Connecting thoughts, feelings and behavior**

- helps the client articulate specific thoughts related to problems
- helps the client question the validity of specific thoughts related to problem
- helps clients recognize physical sensations associated with emotions
- encourages clients to try new behaviors and track the impact on feelings and thoughts
- helps the client see the connection between their thoughts, their feelings and their subsequent actions

20) **Dealing with ambivalence**

- helps articulate client's ambivalence clearly and non-judgmentally
- uses empathy to convey an understanding of the client's perspective
- helps client identify a discrepancy between current behavior and what the client wants
- rolls with resistance and reflects back accurately and non-judgmentally clients reasons for not changing
- supports client's belief in themselves that they can change
- asks open ended questions that elicit change talk

21) **Embracing difficult conversations (may include)**

- establishing the client is open and ready for a conversation involving feedback
- feedback is specific, descriptive and manageable (see page 2 of this document)
- Allowing client time to respond to feedback
- setting boundaries when client requests are outside of scope of work

22) **Responding in crisis situations (may include)**

- establishing rapport rapidly
- assessing and ensuring client's immediate safety

- helping client determine immediate problems
- acknowledging and validating immediate emotions
- brainstorming and prioritizing steps for action
- developing and/or implementing an action plan
- discussing possibilities for follow up
- asking directly about suicide if warning signs

Conclusion

 The development of communication skills and the art of giving and receiving feedback benefit social work students as they transfer their classroom learning to the professional work environment. We hope these guidelines have provided students with a framework for giving and receiving relevant feedback with their peers in a positive and constructive manner.

References

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