

How To Give Feedback

<http://www.nku.edu/~hcp/How%20to%20give%20feedback.htm>

WHAT IS FEEDBACK AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Giving others feedback is an important part of clear communication. Whether you are communicating with your children or spouse, working with your children's teachers, or working with others on the job, it is important to know how to express your opinion.

Here are some examples of situations where this skill is used:

- Following up with your child after you have assigned him/her a job
- Going over a homework assignment that your child has completed
- Talking to your child's teacher about your child's progress in school
- Discussing projects with coworkers
- Following up with a person who reports to you after you have assigned him/her a task

Giving negative feedback is more difficult for most people than giving positive feedback.

When you are concerned about a situation and want the other person to do something different, it is important that you communicate your concerns carefully.

Giving feedback is easier when you follow these five simple steps:

- Describe the situation.
- Ask the person for his/her view of the situation.
- Come to an understanding of the situation.
- Develop an action plan to resolve the situation.
- Agree to follow up later to make certain the situation has been resolved.

Let's illustrate these steps with an example. Let's say you work with a person named Steve who has made some mistakes scheduling appointments for you. You want to discuss the problem with him and have him correct it.

1. Describe the situation

Steve, these appointments are all scheduled for the 13th and 14th. I asked you to schedule them for the 20th and 21st.

2. Ask the person for his/her view of the situation

Tell me, what was your understanding of what I asked you to do?

3. Come to an understanding of the situation

So you just misunderstood what I wanted. I had written the dates in my note to you, but you didn't read it thoroughly before you started making the calls.

4. Develop an action plan to resolve the situation

I would like you to reschedule all of these appointments before 5:00 today. What will it take for you to do that?

5. Agree to follow up later to make certain the situation has been resolved

I'll check with you at 4:30 to see how you are doing with this.

At 4:30, stop by Steve's desk and ask how he is doing on his calls.

These steps can be easily applied to a variety of situations with your children, spouse, coworkers, and others.

WHAT ARE SOME GUIDELINES FOR GIVING FEEDBACK?

Let's take a look at some other issues to consider when giving feedback to another person.

Put your expectations in writing. Feedback is most effective when it is written down. Having it in writing increases the chance that it will be understood. For

example, in the preceding situation you could simply write down in a note the dates and times that you are available and hand the note to Steve. You could also write "by 5 P.M. today" at the top of the note.

Be sensitive to people's feelings. Some people think that they don't need to worry about others becoming upset. They think that as the parent or boss they have the right to tell people what to do and not worry about their feelings. This is a big mistake. Being concerned about other people's feelings is important in any situation. Effective parents and managers alike demonstrate concern for the self-esteem of their families and team members. This doesn't mean withholding criticism or ignoring problems.

Feedback should be as specific as possible. People have a difficult time responding to instructions that are vague and unclear. It is important to check for understanding; avoid assuming that you are on the same wavelength.

C O M M U N I C A T I O N

Think it through. Always take the time to plan what you want to say before giving feedback. Taking the time to gather your thoughts and clarify what you want your feedback to accomplish increases the chance that you will communicate clearly.

Ask first. Get the other person's point of view before you state what you think should be done. People are more receptive when they have a chance to explain themselves first. You might also learn something unexpected that will explain the situation or change your point of view.

Don't withhold. It is not a good idea to hold back your negative observations. You don't want to criticize too much and cause people to feel discouraged, but people need to know how they are doing.

Follow up. If you see that the person has corrected a problem situation after you have a feedback discussion with them, you still need to follow up. When you follow up, you tell people that you are being thorough and that the work they do is important. This is true in family situations, at work, and with others in your life, such as civic groups you belong to, your children's teachers, or people at your church, mosque, or synagogue.