

# Principles of Effective Feedback

Feedback is verbal or written communication regarding the effects of a person's behavior. It can be motivational or constructive in nature. **Reinforcing feedback** highlights specific effective behavior so that the person is aware of it and will continue to use it. The focus is on reinforcing competence. **Constructive feedback** is intended to help people correct and/or refine their behavior in order to become more effective.

The focus of feedback is ALWAYS to support improved performance. To assist in providing feedback supports competency development follow these principles:



**It is balanced.** Feedback should be strengths-based, offering observations of behaviors that were done well, and also suggestions for improvement. Feedback that consists only of praise may be regarded as patronizing. Feedback that is too critical may be resented and rejected.

**It is behavioral.** In order for feedback to be useful, it needs to focus on behavior the person can change. It needs to focus on the specific aspect of performance you want the person to continue doing or stop doing. Limit or eliminate

adjectives and provide concrete examples whenever possible. Generally, it is easier for people to change behaviors than attitudes.

**It is relevant.** Effective feedback should be directly related to performing a task better. Feedback about unrelated matters may be perceived as petty or distracting. Avoid use of jargon or technical terms that the other person may not understand.

**It is participative.** In order for feedback to be successful, people must commit to trying the new techniques or behaviors being suggested. The best way to do this is to involve people in generating ideas for change; for example, "What could you do in the future to improve? Why did you/didn't you do this? What might be the root cause for you?"

**It is prioritized.** There is a limit on how many improvement priorities a person can focus on at a given time. Typically, it is about 3-4 items per session before the worker's threshold is reached. Feedback should be given so that the most important points are presented first, then the second most important point, and so on. Each person will have a different threshold, so watch for cues to determine whether the person receiving the feedback might have reached his or her limit. Remember the goal is to keep the participant receiving the feedback in the learning zone versus anxiety or apathy zone.



Source: Adapted from American Public Human Services Association (2011)