Communication: Effective Feedback

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After reading the newsletter, the home health aide should be able to:

1. Define feedback and its purpose in the communication process.
2. Identify situations in which positive or negative feedback should be given.
3. Discuss guidelines for providing and receiving feedback effectively.

As a home health aide, a major part of your job involves effective communication with others. You communicate with clients, their family members and visitors, staff in your agency, and many others. There are many types and purposes of communication in the work setting. One that is often avoided and/or may become problematic is feedback.

This newsletter will discuss feedback as a part of the communication process, including its definition and purpose. Guidelines for providing effective feedback, as well as pitfalls to avoid, will also be covered.

What is Feedback?

Feedback is an important part of the communication process between people in all settings, including work, home, family, school and social settings. Feedback can be defined as a return of information that occurs in response to a process, action, or experience. The purpose of feedback is typically to make some change or to provide reinforcement to the process, action or experience. A common example is the annual "performance review," during which an employee's strengths and areas for improvement are discussed, along with plans to address these.

In fact, many of us may think of feedback only in the formal sense, such as that performance review or evaluation. However, you don't have to be a supervisor to provide feedback. You likely provide feedback every day, such as by expressing your opinions and responses to the actions and words of others. Perhaps you are helping to orient a new home health aide, or you need to provide feedback on the work schedule that has just been posted. Sometimes you may even need to provide feedback to visitors... "I'm sorry, but smoking is allowed outside only due to use of oxygen in the home." In the work setting, providing timely and useful feedback is essential to working effectively with others, and to the process of communication. Without feedback, people don't know if you've heard their message, or how you're responding to a situation.

Feedback can be either positive or negative. Positive feedback is given when the process or action is considered successful and should continue. For example, when helping to orient a new home health aide, Anna says, "You transferred and ambulated Mr. Joss safely and efficiently—great job!" Negative feedback is given when a change in the process or action is desired, to obtain better results, as in, "The charges for those supplies are placed in this folder— could you please put them in there next time? Thanks."

Providing Effective Feedback

Providing feedback is a skill that, when done properly, can result in improved processes and relationships. Done improperly, it can have the opposite effect, resulting in defensiveness and a worsened situation. There are some principles, however, that are helpful in achieving the best possible outcome.

In general, when you see a situation in which you need to provide feedback, do so as soon as possible after the event occurs. That's when recollection of the event is best, for both you and the other person. The exception to this is if you're angry or upset at the time. In that case, a waiting period of a day or two may be better, so that you can approach it in a calm and objective manner. But don't let it go much longer than that, or your feedback may lose its impact. Take sufficient time to clearly think about the situation before responding. Before approaching the person, think through what you plan to say, and make sure you have the correct facts.

When giving feedback, remember that how you say something often makes a greater impact than what you actually say. If your tone is angry, defensive, or condescending, that is what the person will take from the encounter, rather than the actual message you were trying to send. Likewise, even praise loses its value when delivered in a sullen or sarcastic tone. The person receiving feedback should always be treated with respect.

To give positive feedback, it's helpful to put the focus on the other person, using "you" statements, such as "You kept Mrs. Barr calm and happy during her bath, thanks so much." For negative feedback, keep the focus on yourself, using "I" statements, such as "I couldn't find any clean bed linens, so please put them in the washing machine after you change them." This helps to reduce any defensiveness the other person may feel. If you need to provide negative feedback, do so in an area where others cannot see or hear the interaction. No one likes to have faults pointed out in front of others.

Feedback should be clear, accurate, and specific, citing observable behaviors… "You gave good directions for ambulating to Mr. Myers, and you stayed calm when he got upset— you handled that really well." This is especially important if negative feedback must be given. When giving negative feedback to someone, address only one issue at a time. If a laundry list of issues is suddenly brought out, the person often feels unfairly attacked, and the feedback loses its effectiveness. This means issues must be dealt with as they arise, rather than letting them, and your aggravation, pile up. Also, stick to the facts, and avoid exaggeration, such as, "You always forget to change the linens on Mrs. Hope's bed, and then I have to do it when I come on." It's better to say, "I had to change Mrs. Hope's bed linens again today. Please remember to do that next time." And remember, feedback is not a one-way street. Ask for and listen carefully to any responses the other person has to your feedback.

Receiving Feedback

In addition to being able to provide effective feedback to others, it is important that you be able to receive feedback appropriately, as well. Careful listening is key to understanding the feedback you are given, so do not talk or interrupt while the issue is being explained. Do not immediately jump to conclusions or start defending your actions. If negative feedback is given, make sure you have enough information to fully understand the situation, and how to correct it. Ask questions as needed to get this information. For example, when did the situation occur, what were the effects, and what should have been done instead?

Maintain a very respectful attitude while receiving feedback, especially negative feedback. This is important even if you disagree with the person's account of the situation. Discuss the situation thoroughly with the person, and explain your actions, if necessary, without becoming defensive or angry. Keep an open mind, and try to view the situation from the other person's perspective. Discuss with the person providing feedback how the situation can best be corrected, and how you can avoid similar issues in the future. If the negative feedback is being given by your supervisor in response to your job performance, these responses from you are important, as he or she will want to know that you understand what the concern is, and how to prevent future incidents. Also, ask your supervisor for any assistance you may need, such as workshops or additional training, to promote improvement in the area.

Feedback is an important part of the communication process, particularly in the work setting. By providing and receiving feedback effectively, you can foster improved work practices and relationships in your facility.

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Communication: Effective Feedback

NAME:_____ DATE:_____ UNIT:_____

Directions: Place the letter of the one best answer in the space provided.

_____1. Feedback is best defined as:
    A. sending a verbal message to another person
    B. listening carefully when someone is speaking
    C. returning information in response to an action
    D. making sure that what you say has been understood

_____2. As part of the communication process, feedback occurs only in the work setting.
    A. True
    B. False

_____3. The main purpose of feedback is to:
    A. change or reinforce how something is done
    B. ensure that errors do not occur
    C. provide documentation when job performance is poor
    D. improve self-esteem

_____4. Feedback is always a formal process, provided only by managers to those they supervise.
    A. True
    B. False

_____5. Which of the following is an example of negative feedback?
    A. "Did you complete the documentation of Mrs. Gray's fall?"
    B. "You did a good job getting to your assignments today."
    C. "The lab tech should be at Mr. Kay's house around 9:00."
    D. "Smoking is not allowed in the house, you'll have to go outside."

_____6. In general, feedback should be given how long after the event occurs?
   A. as soon as possible
   B. 2 days
   C. 3—4 days
   D. 1 week or longer

_____7. When providing feedback, the tone of voice often makes more of an impact than what is actually said.
   A. True
   B. False

_____8. The nurse is providing feedback to the home health aide regarding documentation. Which of the following demonstrates the best way to provide positive feedback?
   A. "I noticed that you were able to finish the documentation."
   B. "The manager needed your documentation, and was glad to get it."
   C. "The documentation was done well."
   D. "You finished the documentation accurately and on time."

_____9. General guidelines for providing negative feedback include all of the following EXCEPT:
   A. have your facts straight and think it through before starting
   B. provide privacy
   C. start sentences with "You"
   D. address only one issue at a time

_____10. Lisa approaches her co-worker, Sarah, with the concern that Sarah didn't show up for an assignment when they had agreed to switch work days, and were given permission to do so. As Lisa is explaining the issue, Sarah should:
   A. look for the calendar on her phone to show that Lisa is mistaken
   B. inform Lisa that she has never made an error with her schedule before
   C. think about mistakes Lisa has made so she can bring them up
   D. remain quiet and listen carefully

Group Tracking Log

Employee Name	Test Date	Time	Comments	Signature