GUIDELINES FOR ASKING FOR AND GIVING FEEDBACK

In social work since there are no correct answers to equations or formulas to follow, feedback is essential to our learning and progress. Potential sources of feedback are all around us, including clients, agency staff, community members, yourself, and your field instructor.

Many factors affect our response, including our past experiences with feedback, confidence level, and trust in and respect for the person giving the feedback. Some people when they receive positive feedback blush, discount it, and feel undeserving. Others interpret negative feedback as punishment, become defensive and also discount it as undeserved. Feedback is more effective when labels are avoided, suggestions are offered for improvement, and objective information is shared openly. The following acronym (SPIN) is provided as a guideline to insure the feedback you give and receive is helpful and conducive to building an open, honest, and positive relationship.

S – Specific – Describe specific behavior that you are appreciating or making suggestions for changes in.

P – Positive – Ask about behaviors that are working well, acknowledge changes they have already made, goals they have already accomplished, positive suggestions for change.

I – I Messages – Ask for feedback using I messages. This helps you to identify your own issues, thoughts, and feelings, and take responsibility for being part of the relationship.

N – Negotiate – Ask for feedback in order to open discussion, realizing that the person you are asking may or may not be ready to discuss the subject yet or in the terms you suggest. Also remember that various perceptions are possible and the 'truth' may be a combination of both your own impressions and the person you are asking for feedback.

*Adapted from 'Learning Through Field', by Susan F. Cochrane and Marla Martin Hanley, Allyn and Bacon, 1999.

COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

Feedback is:

- Stated in behavioral terms and based on learning objectives
- Based on data accessible to both student and field instructor
- Timely: ongoing, regular, and as close to the event as possible
- Clearly stated in a concise and direct manner
- Clearly stated in a respectful manner
- Specific, defined by examples
- Balanced, including positive and critical comments
- Clearly identifies strengths
- Clearly identifies skills that need to be developed
- Clearly identifies 'ineffective behaviors'
- Clearly identifies alternative helpful behaviors
- Understood and invites discussion
- Reciprocal and mutual
- Follow up on how feedback is used is an important part of the process

Bogo and Vayda, 1998