

6. Dealing with difficult feedback situations:

There are many situations that are considered difficult when providing feedback. There are some general words of advice for dealing with difficult feedback situations, particularly if you anticipate an emotional response:

- Be supportive
- Remain calm
- Ensure privacy, and choose an appropriate time (and enough time) to give negative feedback
- Provide time for the feedback recipient to express their emotions; listen patiently
- Demonstrate that you understand what they are saying (active listening)
- Avoid prescriptive solutions; invite the feedback recipient to suggest suitable solutions to the problem
- Be prepared to reschedule the feedback session if necessary

The following situations have been identified by supervisors as being difficult to handle when providing feedback; strategies for managing them are included:

FEEDBACK DIFFICULTY	SUGGESTED MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES
Anger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Remain calm and avoid entering into an argument - Draw a boundary by asking the person what they want from you
Apathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enquire about a known interest or achievement and develop the conversation around that - Use open-ended questions to elicit information - Reinforce the importance of two-way communication
Arrogance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arrogance is a defense mechanism, usually guarding against vulnerability and insecurity; listen carefully to their perspective but don't become defensive or argumentative - Focus on the behaviours that aren't acceptable and suggest a problem-solving approach to the issue
Crying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Listen patiently but don't let tears stop you from giving feedback or cause you to give less of it
Defensiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Suggest a problem-solving approach to the issue - Avoid criticism and complaints
Disagreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Listen carefully to their perspective but don't become defensive or argumentative - Check the reasons for the disagreement - Be empathic - Reschedule the discussion if more time is required to gather supporting information
Lacking insight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clearly re-establish expected behaviours and outcomes - Use evidence to demonstrate how performance is not meeting expected standards - Explain the impact of this on the unit, co-workers, patients, others
Silence and emotional withdrawal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Silence and withdrawal is a defensive tactic that people may use if they feel they are being attacked; identify their fears and concerns