
Giving Effective Feedback

Resources for Supervisors/Mentors

Why give feedback?

As a mentor, it is crucial that you provide guidance to your mentee. It is your obligation to help your mentee identify and learn the skills and knowledge needed for a successful career. Feedback allows you to acknowledge your mentee's strengths and to motivate the mentee to work on areas of weakness. Keep in mind that your mentee wants and needs your feedback to move forward in his or her ministerial (professional) formation.

When to provide feedback?

There is no answer set in stone, but the general answer is that you should provide feedback frequently. It is helpful to provide it on a regular basis so your mentee doesn't get bogged down pursuing the wrong path or practicing unhelpful behaviors. Feedback should be given on a timely basis as well. It is not helpful to provide feedback about a behavior or task long after the behavior has occurred or the task has been completed. Prompt and frequent feedback will go a long way toward building a positive relationship.

How to give constructive and effective feedback?

The most important element in providing effective feedback is establishing an atmosphere of mutual trust and regard. When a feeling of trust has been created, it is easier both to give and to accept feedback. Make sure that the student understands that you are working toward a mutual goal—the student's success.

When you give feedback, it is important to

1. Acknowledge the mentee's accomplishments and successes along with the areas in which he or she needs to improve.
2. Be specific in providing feedback. It is not terribly helpful to say, "You need to work on your preaching." It is much more useful to describe the specific element of a task that concerns you. Focus on behaviors that can be changed, not personality traits.
3. Keep the feedback simple. When planning to give feedback, decide on a small number of areas that you want to cover. You don't want to create a shopping list of faults that could overwhelm and discourage the mentee.
4. If a mentee is slipping in his or her work, don't automatically assume a lack of commitment. Explore with your mentee what is really going on.
5. When providing negative feedback, suggest alternative behaviors or offer to work with your mentee to develop solutions to any problems that he or she is encountering.
6. Encourage reflection. This will involve posing open questions such as:
 - (a) Did it go as planned? If not, why not?
 - (b) If you were doing it again what would you do the same next time and what would you do differently? Why?
 - (c) How did you feel during the [task]? How would you feel about doing it again?
 - (d) How do you think the [person] felt? What makes you think that?
 - (e) What did you learn from this [task]?

Providing and receiving feedback can be a very positive experience for the mentor and the student as long as you both understand that you share the same commitment to developing the student's career.