

10 tips for feedback in clinical situations

Feedback is a powerful development tool to use when you are working with residents or as a form of continuous improvement between peers or with team members. The AO Education Institute has compiled these 10 tips that will help you to get the most out of your clinical feedback conversations.



1. Establish a respectful environment.

Ensuring feedback takes place in a quiet, private space fosters openness and mutual respect. Post-operatively, don't start talking in front of colleagues but step away to a conference room.



2. Clarify feedback goals.

Make the purpose of your feedback clear and emphasize that it is a tool for development, not criticism, making it more meaningful and better received. Explain that your feedback on the precision of a surgical approach will contribute to the patient outcome.



3. Base feedback on direct observation.

Feedback should always be grounded in what you have personally observed. Avoid making assumptions or relying on secondhand information. Refer specifically to how the resident positioned the patient rather than discussing third-party opinions.



4. Make feedback timely and regular.

Provide feedback as soon as possible after the observed event. Timely feedback is relevant and reinforces reflective practice. Regular feedback sessions should be an integral part of clinical training and contribute to enhancing patient safety. For example, immediately after a procedure, review key aspects like instrument handling and suturing technique.



5. Begin the session with self-assessment.

Encourage learners to reflect on their own performance by starting with open-ended questions like, "What do you think went well in your fracture reduction?" This builds rapport and sets a collaborative tone.



6. Reinforce and correct behaviors.

Balance your feedback by recognizing positive behaviors and addressing areas for improvement. Be specific and constructive when suggesting alternative approaches to enhance performance and patient outcome. "Your approach was precise, which minimized bleeding. Next time, ensure your visualization is optimal before making the first incision."



7. Focus on communication.

Use clear, neutral, and specific language. Pay attention to your tone and body language. Encourage open dialogue and avoid appearing defensive or confrontational.



8. Conclude with an action plan.

End each session with a concrete plan for improvement. Guide the feedback recipient towards an improvement plan and commit to actionable steps. Agreeing with the resident on practicing suturing in simulation sessions to enhance their speed and accuracy will have a good chance of reaching measurable progress.



9. Reflect on your feedback skills.

Just as learners should reflect on their performance, take time to evaluate your own feedback style and technique. Consider what worked well and identify areas for improvement in your delivery. Request feedback on your feedback skills from learners and/or peers!



10. Make feedback part of institutional culture.

Promote a culture where feedback is normalized and valued. Emphasize its role in fostering effective teams and enhancing patient safety. Encourage colleagues to view feedback as an essential component of professional growth and patient care. For example, implement routine team debriefs post-surgery to create a shared learning environment.