

Managing Constructive Feedback and Harsh Criticism

PART 1: RECEIVING FEEDBACK

The strategies listed below can help you appropriately handle the situation when someone offers feedback, regardless of whether it is *constructive* or *destructive*.

- **Keep cool: Avoid escalation.** Different emotions are experienced differently in your body – maybe your face starts to feel warm when you're embarrassed, or your chest feels tight when you get angry. These sensations are your own early warning system letting you know that, unless interrupted, you may be flooded with strong negative emotions and thoughts. When receiving feedback and criticism, your number 1 job is to stay cool by keeping your own emotions and thoughts in check: turn your attention to your breath, relax and breathe more deeply and slowly. You may also explain to the other person that you would like to discuss the issue after you have both calmed down and you can think more clearly. Sometimes it even helps to develop your own one – or two – sentence script to help interrupt or deescalate the exchange.
- **Listen: Show that you want to understand.** Be respectful and don't interrupt the other person – just hear them out. To help clarify the issue and show that you are trying to listen, try summarising what they said: "I thought I heard you say _____. Is that right?"
- **Apologies: Correct misunderstandings.** If you have misunderstood the issue, apologise and, if appropriate discuss what steps you can take to "put things right."

PART 11: GIVING FEEDBACK

The strategies below can help you effectively give feedback to someone else.

- **Stay calm and choose the right time.** Timing is everything! It's better not to confront anyone when you are angry. To be effective, you need to be in control so you can choose your words carefully; otherwise, you may say things that you will regret.
- **Choose the place.** Many times, it is not appropriate to confront someone when others are around; this can be embarrassing for everyone. Instead, choose a private setting.
- **Check out misunderstandings.** Before giving feedback, you may want to check that there has been no misunderstanding so that you can back down gracefully if the mistake is yours or the other person can apologise if the mistake is theirs.
- **Don't blame.** Don't use "blaming" language, but instead help the other person see your point of view by providing feedback about the behaviour of concern rather than about the person's character or personality.
- **Use "I" language.** Use "I" messages that focus on *your* responsibilities and needs, and the issues that concern you about the other person's behaviour.