

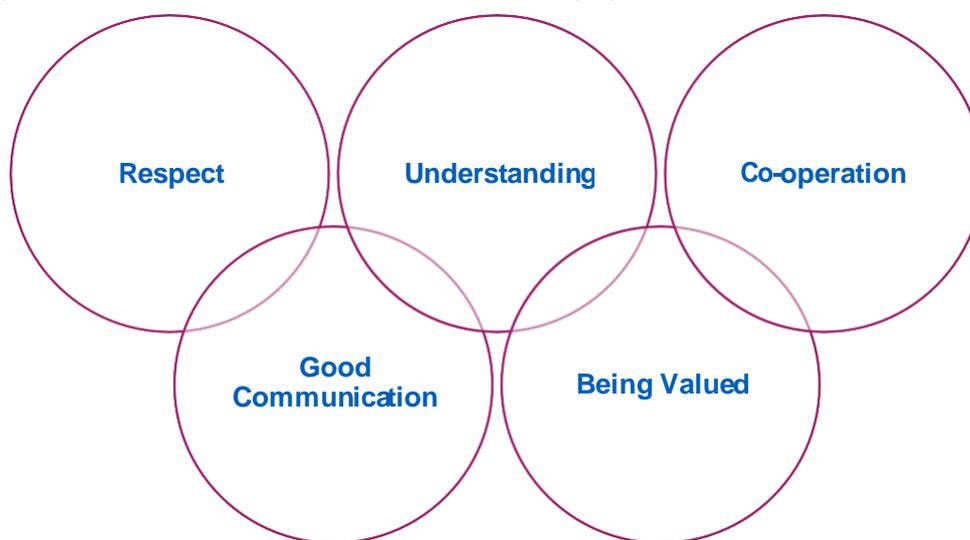
Module: Begin well and carry on!

Module in Communication Skills for Supervisors

Why build good relationships with trainees?

Building a good relationship with trainees from the outset will enhance their experience of training, support them to engage well with the team and encourage them to communicate if they are struggling. When these features are present trainees are far more likely to succeed and to engage well with their training, even if the circumstances are challenging.

Good working relationships build trust, motivation, engagement and retention. They are built on:



More than this, good working relationships can support staff to stay healthy. Being able to trust and speak in confidence to a trainer creates a sense of psychological safety which can be extremely important to trainees. This is important in normal times, but the need has been heightened by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Professor Neil Greenberg of Kings College, London has been providing the NHS with advice about how best to support frontline staff during the pandemic. His work is based on over two decades as a consultant occupational and forensic psychiatrist with the UK armed forces. Among his top tips for supporting staff and avoiding the development of mental health issues are:

- **Ensure you create a supportive team environment**, so team members get to know each other and can recognise the early signs of distress.
- **Prepare supervisors to have emotionally savvy conversations.** The ability of supervisors to be able to be with staff who are in distress or are dealing with significant challenges can have help to avoid mental health issues from developing.

(Professor Neil Greenberg, 2020¹)

Building good relationships is not just a nice to have, it is essential to maintain the health and wellbeing of trainees and the workforce as a whole.

¹ Professor Neil Greenberg, Derek Tracy, *What healthcare leaders need to do to protect the psychological well-being of frontline staff in the COVID-19 pandemic*, BMJ Leader, May 2020. [<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/leader-2020-000273>]

How to build good relationships with trainees

Building a good working relationship with trainees is based on the following key areas:

Communication with trainees

- **Acknowledging trainees** for what they have achieved to date and for what they can and will achieve through your work together.
- **Developing skills** such as listening, open questions, empathy and compassion
- **Giving space for questions** and answering them as fully as you can.
- **Ensuring clarity.** Ensuring both you and your trainees are clear about the basis of your working relationship and how it will work.
- **Managing your boundaries.** Being clear about what you say yes and no to.
- **Being as positive as you can** even if a trainee is not doing well. Be supportive rather than critical – this can make all the difference.
- **Taking a stance such as: ‘I am on your side, walking beside you’.**
- **Appreciating trainees.** Saying thank you, regularly, even for small things

Attitudes & Approaches

- **Demonstrating value and respect** for the other person and reflecting on your personal approach to this
- **Being understanding** if someone is struggling or is finding something difficult.
- **Recognising and embracing difference and diversity.** Recognise there may be differences between trainees of different social and cultural backgrounds and reflect on your behaviour towards these differences
- **Being inclusive in your approach to all trainees.** Discovering your own unconscious biases (we all have them) and how this may affect your approach to different trainees. Challenging these to develop the ability to have open discussions with ALL trainees and non-training junior colleagues
- **Giving time to trainees.** Ensure you meet or speak regularly and commit to ongoing development of the relationship

Looking after self

- **Role model good practice** in terms of your role, time-keeping, attitudes and behaviours.
- **Supporting your own wellbeing.** By doing this you will have capacity to support others.

If you begin well, it will be far easier to continue to build a good relationship with the trainee rather than having to overcome something. However, we all meet people that we find more challenging than others to get along with and so even if that is the case, using the above approaches will go a long way to improving the relationship.

The risks of not building good relationships with trainees

In busy times and with frequently rotating trainees, it can seem like a challenge to have to spend time with someone to get to know them and find out what they need, or to support someone when they are struggling.

Begin well and carry on!

However, a poor relationship with a trainee can have a detrimental impact not only on them and their training, but also on team morale, engagement levels, staff retention and ultimately patient safety.

A report of exit interviews with junior doctors who had left the NHS before the pandemic highlighted the three key reasons for leaving as 'loss of respect, lack of value and fragmented teamwork'. (BMJ, February 2020²).

Attending to the people side of training as well as the clinical side will pay dividends and it does not need to take lots of time. The simple act of listening – even for five minutes – can go a long way to building rapport and opening up a way forward with a trainee.

Further reading and resources:

1. Hannah C.P. Wilson, Arabella L. Simpkin, *Why are so many doctors quitting the NHS?* BMJ, February 2020. [<https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2020/02/06/why-are-so-many-doctors-quitting-the-nhs/>]
2. Professor Neil Greenberg, Derek Tracy, *What healthcare leaders need to do to protect the psychological well-being of frontline staff in the COVID-19 pandemic*, BMJ Leader, May 2020. [<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/leader-2020-000273>]
3. Professor Neil Greenberg, *Tips for Mental Health Professionals – caring for people affected by Covid-19*, NHS England, 2020. [<https://www.england.nhs.uk/supporting-our-nhs-people/how-to-guides/tips-for-mental-health-professionals/>]

Note:

This introductory module is part of a wider toolkit has been developed as bite sized modules and exercises to allow trainers to develop the skills and attitudes outlined above to enable coaching style conversations and deal with challenging areas such as managing conflict or providing feedback