

## Module: Building a good relationship with your supervisor

### Module in Communication Skills for Trainees

#### 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.

This module provides some tips on how to get to know your trainer, how they can get to know you and why that might be a good idea.

#### What difference could it make?

When you start a new rotation or placement the chances are you will be working with a new team, often in a new location, and you might be living away from family and friends. This can make it hard to feel settled and get to know new people.

It may be that you find this easy, but many trainees do not. So if you can build a good relationship with your trainers and supervisors, this can go a long way to making your training more enjoyable and rewarding.

Your trainers and supervisors are there to support you and guide you. If they get to know you a little you might find it easier to go to them at times when you need additional support, or to share concerns you have.

This includes dealing with setbacks. Sometimes your trainer might need to give you some challenging feedback and if you have a good relationship with them it will be far easier to deal with this.

Think of your trainers as being 'on your side'. They want you to progress and their job is to support you with this as far as possible.

#### 1. Be proactive

The first tip is to be proactive. Make sure you get to see your trainer or supervisor on a regular basis. Even if work is busy and meetings get cancelled, be the one to rearrange them so you have something in place.

It is far easier to keep a conversation going once it has a regular pattern, than to have to find your trainer to ask something when you have not seen them for a while.

## 2. Share your values, goals and ambitions

If your trainer knows more about what brought you into medicine or dentistry it can give them a better understanding of what is important to you and how they can guide you through your training. You might like to share your answers to the following questions:

- What made you decide to become a doctor or dentist?
  - What's important to you about working in this profession?
  - Where would you ideally like to get to in your career?
  - What inspires you about your work?
- 

## 3. Share what you think you could bring to the trust / clinic / practice

As well as your overall career goals and ambitions, what do you think you could bring to this workplace?

Let your trainer know if you have ideas for something you could contribute. Let them know where your interests lie and how you could bring them in here. The chances are your trainer will be more than happy to support you with this where possible.

---

## 4. Share any challenges you face

Sometimes people are concerned to share challenges but if you can let your trainer know about areas you are finding difficult, they can support you with your growth and development in that area.

For example, let's say you had some feedback at your last placement which suggested you need to speak out in teaching sessions. If you share this with your trainer in a spirit of looking to see how you can improve it, they could support you to look for opportunities to build your confidence in this area.

Remember your trainer wants you to progress and do well

---

## 5. Share something about your lived experience

Tell your trainer something about yourself and your lived experience. If you trained overseas, share something about that.

What was it like? What is different about being in the UK? What is the same?

Of course, you do not need to share personal or confidential information that is private for you unless it is relevant, but you might like to share something which can help your trainer to get to know and understand you better.

---

## 6. Ask questions

Ask questions when you do not understand something or need help. As a trainee you are not expected to know everything. It is ok to ask for help, guidance or information. This is how you will learn. The chances are if you want to ask a question, others do too.

Also ask questions to get to know your trainer a little. Why did they choose their profession? What do they enjoy about it? What was the biggest lesson they learned when they were training?

---

## 7. Be open to feedback

Receiving feedback is part of the training and learning journey. Sometimes feedback is positive and feels good, at other times it feels more challenging.

If you can be open to feedback and see it as information designed to support you to learn and grow, you will really benefit from it.

If you have built a good relationship with your trainer, it will be far easier for them to give you feedback and for you to receive it because you will have a base of trust

You might like to see our worksheet on Feedback tips and tools for more information.

---

## 8. Be friendly and professional

If you think about people you enjoy working with, they will tend to be people you get on well with. It is possible to be friendly at work and yet be professional. Getting to know your trainer does not mean you become friends or socialise together. It means you can build a friendly and professional working relationship and that can go a long way to support you with your training.

---

### Some conversation starters

Here are some simple ways to begin a conversation with your trainer. They are not intended to be scripts but to show how it is possible to introduce a range of areas. This list is not designed to be exhaustive.

*'Could we arrange to have a chat later today? I'd like to talk about how I can make the most out of this placement.'*

*'Could I tell you a little about my background as I think it could be really helpful for you to understand more about me?'*

*'Would it be helpful if I shared why I came into (X specialty) and where I'd like to get to?'*

*'Now I've been here a while, I'd really like to share some ideas I have about things I could contribute.'*

*'Could we explore my strengths and weaknesses so I can map out areas I need to focus on? I can share what I think, and I'd be happy to hear your thoughts.'*

*'What made you decide to come into medicine / dentistry?'*

*'What do you enjoy about your work?'*

*'What's it like to be a trainer?'*

*'I know you are very busy, I wondered if we could speak later today as I have some questions about this morning's clinic?'*

*'I'd really like to share some feedback I had on my last rotation/ today that I found very challenging, to see how I can address it.'*

*'I haven't been feeling too confident lately and I'd really appreciate some support.'*

*'I'm really worried about my upcoming ARCP, could we spend some time focusing on it next week?'*

*'I've been finding it hard to step up into my role and I'd really value your thoughts about what I could do differently.'*

### **Top Tip – Practise!**

Think about different ways you could begin a conversation with your trainer and if it seems difficult, try to find a friend or colleague you could practise with. People often say they do not like role play but it is a really good way to increase confidence in conversations so if you can, give it a go!