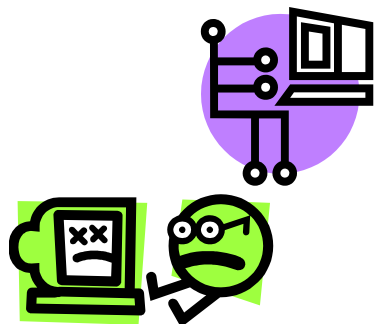


## GIVING FEEDBACK ONLINE

By Gill Jones



Online feedback needs particular care and is an important part of our training course. Not only is it useful to offer feedback to colleagues after a roleplay but there will also be occasions online where you want to offer your views on an issue in a way which ensures that they are received and understood and not dismissed by a recipient who feels you are criticising them unjustly.



Giving and receiving feedback is an important part of many counsellor training courses and most of us welcome it - good and bad - because when it is skilfully done we can learn and develop through the insights it offers. This can be particularly true of online feedback. Since we have a written record of what took place in an online environment we can make our feedback very specific

and useful to the recipient. However, online feedback does need to be approached carefully if it is to be effective.

**Due to the disinhibition of text-only communication, it is very important that our feedback is offered in a helpful way.**

On our training courses we treat each other as we would like to be treated ourselves because we are all trained counsellors and respect each other's training and skills. Offering a colleague feedback can be tricky. On f2f counsellor training courses, we can offer a colleague feedback and see immediately how it is received by their body language and other non-verbal cues. (If necessary we can check verbally to see how the person has received it.) Online, these cues are missing and feedback can be experienced in a destructive and damaging way when it is not carefully offered because we cannot check how the other person is receiving it. Online we have no way of softening our text with a caring expression on our face. Nor can we offer it tentatively as a suggestion *unless we write this into our text*.

At the end of the roleplay on the *General Course* you are all asked to send feedback to your counsellors out of role. As clients, you have given your colleague an introductory opportunity to try out their online counselling 'voice' and your feedback as their colleague can help them develop this online voice further. Your feedback offers constructive criticism of how you (as client) experienced them as a counsellor and takes account of the fact that their theoretical orientation may be different from your own. Suggestions should only be offered very tentatively.

# treat others as you would like to be treated yourself

Constructive feedback offers both positive and negative comments as necessary. It does not avoid a negative point, but offers it in such a way that the person receiving the feedback hears the point clearly and learns from it for their future work. It also helps if you are very specific, own your feelings and comment on behaviour rather than the person. For example, "I was feeling irritated when you described my issues as a problem..." will be more likely to be heard than "You irritated me with your views on my problem...". It also helps to enclose the negative parts in a positive/negative/positive "sandwich" (saying something positive, then the negative part, then ending with something positive again). Here is an extract from a recent feedback email following the online roleplay exercise on our *General Certificate Course*. The negative parts of this feedback are in red font.

## **"Client Feedback to R**

My overall impression of you, R, both as a client and as a colleague, is that you are a very safe, containing counsellor when working online. Your warmth, humanity and caring really shone through in your work with me, and your very gentle humour/teasing too (more of that later).

Gemma was a mixture of about 3 clients I have at present, all having difficult times at home and feeling disloyal for owning their 'bad' feelings

and for being selfish. You picked up how ashamed and disloyal I felt right from the start, and acknowledged how hard it had been to make contact in the first place. However, I did find it difficult to accept your optimism "I feel there is a solution and that you will get there". As Gemma, I can remember feeling quite sad and wistful, but also despairing because I could not see how a solution could possibly be found. I think I also felt a touch of "well it's all very well for him, what does he know about it?" But in another way, it was good to have a different perspective and to hear your belief, hope and optimism at a time when Gemma felt lost, stuck and helpless. So it was wonderful for Gemma when you asked her more about herself. I can remember thinking "here's somebody who actually wants to know more about ME, who's listening", but then you asked about "the good things" in my life too, and that brought me back down to earth again and made me realise there weren't any.

Telling you more about myself was really important. And it was good that you asked me specific questions, because otherwise I would have just said "oh there's not much to say really".

In your reply you dealt very efficiently with my question about confidentiality, but to be honest it felt a bit 'jargon-y' and as Gemma I hadn't a clue what you were talking about (eg 'adhere' not a word young people use a lot!, who or what is BACP?). I also wonder about dealing with it at the beginning, and whether it might have been better later on in the email. I appreciate you probably wanted to get the business out of the way and into the meat, so to speak, but as the young, vulnerable client I wanted to know straight away that you'd heard me and appreciated what a tough time I was having at home. You really picked up on how taken for granted I was feeling, and it was such a relief to know that you understood and weren't judging me. I liked the way you gave me permission to be cross, too "Would it be right to say you also feel very cross with her? Can you tell me just how cross ..." It felt like you were saying "yes, it's ok to be cross, and yes, you can be very, very cross if you want to" which made me realise I wasn't just cross, I was really angry with my Mum.

One phrase that didn't go down too well with me was "and that has to be a grown-up and mature thing to do!!" I appreciate that you were trying to bolster my belief in myself and my capabilities, but it felt a bit grown up and patronising. However, you followed it with a magical phrase "When I read that you are feeling so low and lonely it made me

feel very upset for you - you don't deserve to feel this way." I immediately felt all warm, loved, valued and cared for."

*This extract is reproduced by permission of the students .*

Offering feedback online is a good way to develop your text communication skills.

