



C: The Preceptor/Preceptee Relationship

Knowing how to build a trusting relationship, how to communicate effectively and how to handle conflict are important to help keep the preceptor/preceptee relationship working smoothly.

Building Trust

The learner should feel like a partner. This partnership can evolve over time as the learner is permitted to function to the full extent of their skill and knowledge level.

Build trust by:

- Remaining open to new ideas that the preceptee may bring and information that may challenge what we have always done.
- Maintaining an environment of respect and acceptance. Give them meaningful tasks to do.
- Seeing the preceptee as a valuable addition to your work unit. Don't treat them as if they are a "5th wheel", slowing the work or flow of patients.
- Being honest. Don't be afraid to say "I don't know."

- Supporting learners when they need support but don't make them dependent on you.
- Understanding the individual, attending to the little things, keeping promises, **clarifying expectations**, being consistent, having personal integrity and apologizing if necessary.
- Modeling professional and respectful ways of working through conflict.

Communication

- Listen first and then respond. Understand before you try to be understood.
- Before you react to a message try to clarify that you correctly understood what the other person was saying. Paraphrase what they said to check if you received the message correctly. "What I heard you say was ...Is this correct?"
- Be aware of your non-verbals—make eye contact, and try not to be distracted or focused on other tasks at the same time as you are listening.
- Pay attention to the other person's body language.
- Be generous in providing praise, support and encouragement.
- Be gentle and constructive when offering feedback on the preceptee's performance.
- You can never communicate too much or too often. **They may forget what you said but they will never forget how you made them feel.**

Managing Conflict Effectively

- Address the problem, situation and behaviour in question. Be hard on the problem, not the person.
- Ask questions to understand what is happening. Resist making assumptions and hypotheses.

- Talk about your feelings in a professional manner and express yourself respectfully — even if reciprocated from the person you're talking with.
- Figure out if you may be inadvertently contributing to the problem. If you are, take ownership of your role and explore options that might be more helpful.
- By listening to someone else's perspective you can gain insight into their point of view. See the issue from their perspective — even though you may disagree. You can understand AND disagree!
- Move from a problem-based discussion to figuring out what is needed. It's easy to get stuck in a circular discussion, trying to debate and establish who is "right" and who is "wrong." Instead, direct the conversation to identifying what the underlying need(s) may be and talk about how you can work together to address those needs.
- You may find it helpful to revisit the expectations and original agreements about the learning experience. It's possible that something has changed since that initial contact and discussion. Perhaps the preceptee has some difficulties in their personal life or perhaps you were less available than anticipated. Remember that most of the time, multiple factors come together to create a conflict.
- If you continue to feel stuck after trying to work it out, talk to the unit educator and consider involving a third party to get input from or facilitate a discussion.
- Keep communicating. Almost every problem in a preceptor/preceptee relationship is related to a lack of communication.

