FEEDBACK IN COMMUNICATION

<u>What is Feedback</u>? Feedback is a means of giving a person (or group) information about how their behaviour affects others. Given skillfully it is a helping, enabling and learning process.

<u>What is Feedback for</u>? Giving and receiving feedback is a learning process for both giver and receiver. Constructive feedback increases self-awareness, offers options and choices and encourages personal development. Constructive feedback does not necessarily mean positive feedback; negative feedback, when given skillfully, can be a useful and effective learning tool.

GIVING FEEDBACK:

Start with the positive - When offering feedback it can help the receiver to hear first what you liked or what you found they did well. In the rush to criticise, the positive aspects can be overlooked.

Be specific - General comments are not helpful when developing skills. They do not provide sufficient detailed information to help a person change. Comments such as, "you were great" or "you were terrible" are unhelpful for learning, they do not tell you which behaviours were "great" of "terrible".

Focus feedback on description rather than judgement.

Focus feedback on behaviour rather than the person.

Focus feedback on observations rather than inferences.

Talk about things that can be changed rather than something over which they have no control, e.g. "it would help me if you made more eye contact" rather than "I don't like the way you look."

Don't overdo it - Less is better than too much! There is often a temptation to say everything and overwhelm the receiver. Provide an appropriate amount of feedback by selecting the most important and relevant information, and allowing the receiver time and space to digest it.

Focus feedback on the value it has for the receiver rather than the sense of "release" or self-importance that it gives you.

Focus on the sharing of ideas and information rather than giving advice. You are not there to tell a person what to do with the feedback.

Think what it says about you - Feedback, and the way it is given, says a great deal about the person that is giving it. Be self-aware in the feedback process so as to avoid imposing or *projecting* your values or your own "stuff" on the receiver.

<u>Receiving Feedback</u>: Remember, it is essential to know what others think and feel about what you do - it is the best information for helping you develop and learn.

Allow your self to be open and listen to both the positive and negative aspects of the information. Do not rush into explaining or making excuses or discussing before you have heard and digested what has been said. Do not become defensive or attacking even if you think the giver is wrong.

Check out the reliability of the feedback with other people to get a balanced view of yourself.

Remember it is always your right to disagree and hold your own opinions

CONFLICT AND
CONFLICT RESOLUTION

At some stage in almost all groups there will be either explicit or covert conflict. How the group and the leader deals with this conflict has enormous importance for the future functioning of the group and its ability to accomplish its task. Below are a number of statements that relate to groups, families, organizations and individuals.

1. *Conflict is inevitable and universal* - people are different with differing ideas, values and beliefs, so there must be disagreement. In any situation where there is a power/authority differential, such as between the group leader and group members or in a family, there is greater potential for conflict.

2. *Conflict is potentially destructive* - disagreement generates personal feelings of anger, competition and hostility that can spiral out of control. This spiral of conflict can become stuck, ritualized or institutionalized to the extent that it is fundamental to the identity or relationship of the participants.

3. *Conflict generates anxiety and avoidance* - this is due to deeply held beliefs and learned responses:

a) Differences = disagreement = conflict = hostility = aggression:- therefore, differences = aggression. Let's all try to be nice and get on with each other.

b) I will get frightened, hurt or humiliated if I disagree - people will get angry with me.

c) People will not like me if I am seen as aggressive - I will be rejected.

d) If I get into an arguement I will get angry and out of control: then I will feel guilty and upset afterwards.

e) It takes too much energy to fight and it won't achieve anything in the end.

4. *Conflict is creative* - disagreements and differences can give rise to new and innovative solutions. Anger and confrontation often provide the impetus for personal or group development if it is contained and resolved appropriately. Conflict provides the opportunity for an intense experience of involvement and contact with other human beings.

5. *Conflict requires attention and resolution* - in order to "move on", differences and disagreements must be acknowledged and worked on in order to achieve a positive and creative outcome. Conflict avoided will block development and surface in dysfunctional ways such as "stuckness" or symptoms.

Signs of Unresolved Conflict.

1. *Denial:*   It does not exist - everything's fine.

2. *Avoidance:*   Its there, but if I ignore it, it will go away.

3. *Displacement:*   Its not this conflict but something else that upsets me.

4. *Dissociating:*   I really can't concentrate on what is happening - I'm all confused.

5. *Discounting:*   It is not important and not worth attention.

6. *Projection:*   It is all their fault - they are to blame for the problems.

7. *Scapegoating:*   We are OK - it is just that other person who always causes trouble.

8. *Splitting:*   We are right and they are wrong. You cannot be both right and wrong.

9. *Introjection:*   It is all my fault and I am a terrible person. I feel terribly guilty.

10. *Acting out:*   I am going to get them. If I can't win, then nobody can.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

As a group leader it is essential to develop adequate conflict resolution skills. A functional approach to unresolved conflict is to recognise the feelings of anger that are aroused. remain engaged in the process and to take responsibility for your part in sorting it out. It is important to see the attacks on you as the leader as not only to do with your actions and inadequacy but also positive attempts of the group to assert their individuality and struggle with their dependency.

Often the conflict that is exhibited between group members is displaced hostility towards the leader. It is easier to resolve if leaders see themself as a legitimate target for these feelings and helps the group focus their hostility towards them.· The leader should try not to become defensive or personally hurt by these attacks. It is vital for the group life that the leader is seen to be strong enough to survive.

All human.communication comprises a number of differing aspects related to content and process:

> *Facts* and information - CONTENT
> *Emotion* and feelings - PROCESS
> *Needs* and motives - PROCESS

In conflictual communication. the *emotion* of anger and the *needs* to win or retaliate tend to overwhelm the *facts* or logic of the situation.

In resolving conflict it is essential to use good communication behaviour without compromising your own integrity. Good strategies include some of the following:

Keeping Calm - remain attentive and involved even if you start to feel attacked. Do not interrupt or contradict.

Listening - listen not only to what the person is saying but also to the feelings they are expressing. Try to understand the needs and motives underlying their communication. What do they want to happen so they can feel better?

Responding - reflect your understanding of what they have said and get feedback on whether you are correct or not. Acknowledge the feelings and the importance of the issue for the other person. It may be enough for them to know they have been heard and validated.

Asserting - stick to your point of view and express it clearly and succinctly. Repeat yourself and provide explanation if necessary. Do not allow yourself to be side tracked or intimidated. Do not become defensive, aggressive or passive.

Resolving - if conflict continues. use the most appropriate strategy from below to resolve the block and move on.

a) **Processing** - getting to the bottom of the disagreement and working it through

b) **Recognising** underlying feelings of competition and animosity - letting go of the need to win or be right

c) **Compromising** - agreeing on a neutral solution

d) **Redefining** or reframing the issue - shifting to a more flexible perspective. eg reframing the issue as related to the group process rather than individual personality

e) **Letting go** - one party agrees to the others point of view. It takes courage to admit you are not right.

f) **Moving on** - agree to differ or settle the issue at another time. You must be careful this is not a form of avoidance.