Communication Hacks for Promoting Learning

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| **Use active listening skills** |
| Give your full attention; indicate engagement through language and body language |
| Ask clarifying questions and restatements to be sure you understand |
| Use pauses to encourage sharing and to give your students time to gather their thoughts and formulate a response |
| Ask open- and not close-ended questions |
| Be sure to acknowledge and thank them for sharing with you |
| **When a student shares something difficult with you, first acknowledge their trust** |
| “Thanks for sharing that” |
| “I appreciate your willingness to share this with me” |
| “I am so sorry to hear that”. |
| **Keep the focus on them and where they are at** |
| Do not feel the need to speak immediately; pauses give them time to gather their thought and formulate a response |
| Do not immediately jump into “fix-it” mode |
| Do not immediately share a similar story of yours (although this may be appropriate at the right time) |
| Be willing to acknowledge the difficult emotions that come up – “I can see you are frustrated”; “That really made you angry”. |
| Do not immediately cut-off crying or the appropriate expression of other emotions. |
| **Make problem-solving a joint effort (recognize and validate their agency in controlling their training experience)** |
| Ask for suggestions before giving your own; e.g. “have you given any thought to how you might…..?”. “What do you think might be the best next step?” |
| Acknowledge mistakes and turn them into learning opportunities – “we all make mistakes; the key is to learn from them. What might you learn from this?” |
| Promote the use of resources - “I understand you are struggling a bit in your XXX class; what resources might you use to work through the material?” |
| Ask if they would like your advice – “I have some thoughts on how you might organize your proposal if you would like to hear them.” |
| Ask questions to elicit their thoughts and reasoning in decision making – “Can you explain your rationale for doing it this way?”; “What lead to this decision?” “What might you do differently next time?” |
| **Acknowledge and don’t minimize difficulty and challenge** |
| “That must have been really hard for you.” |
| “I’m so sorry that happened to you and would like to help.” |
| Avoid dismissing their frustration and disappointment. Try “Paper reviews can be very frustrating, and we need to find a way to move forward regardless.” instead of “Get over it; everyone’s papers get rejected .“ |
| **Show them that you are genuinely interested in them – as people and as emerging scientists** |
| “Tell me about the workshop you went to today.” |
| “What did you think about that talk?” |
| “How was your weekend? Did you do anything relaxing or fun?” |
| **Express confidence in them and their abilities (especially important when they are tackling new tasks, when experiments are not working and during tough times in general)** |
| “I really think you can do this; you’ve handled hard things before.” |
| “You are doing careful experiments and will get to the bottom of this technical issue”. |
| **Take a strengths-based approach when discussing performance** |
| “What do you think went well during your rotation?” |
| In thinking about your committee meeting, what do you think went well? Is there anything you might like to do differently next time?’ |
| “What are you proud of in these fellowship reviews?” |
| **Be honest and kind when sharing difficult news or giving difficult feedback** |
| “I know this is a difficult time for you. When you are ready, I would like to discuss ways we can move forward given the critical input from your committee. Do you think you might be ready to talk tomorrow?” |
| “It is important to me that you carefully consider my concerns about …… as I want you to succeed here.” |
| **Reinforce positive attitudes and behaviors and the use of helpful resources** |
| “You stayed positive even though we hit bumps in the protocol and that was a part of your eventual success”. |
| I am glad you went to the writing workshop; I can see it was helpful based on the new draft of your proposal.” |
| “Thank you for reaching out to \_\_\_\_\_ to discuss stress management strategies. Your willingness to do that is a sign of how seriously you take your work.” |
| **Keep the door open** |
| It seems that you are set for now. Feel free to come back if you want to talk about this again. |
| I appreciate the open discussion about your career goals and hope we can talk about it again as you make progress exploring your next step.” |
| “I would appreciate if you would let me know that you made contact with \_\_\_\_\_ and I am happy to talk again if needed.” |