

## Ep #75: Giving and Getting Negative Feedback



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Heather Branscombe**

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Episode 75, Giving and Getting Negative Feedback.

Welcome to *Clinicians Creating Impact*, a show for physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists looking to take the next step in their careers and make a real difference in the lives of their clients. If you're looking to improve the lives of neurodiverse children and families with neurological-based challenges, grow your own business, or simply show up to help clients, this is the show for you.

I'm Heather Branscombe, Therapist, Certified Coach, Clinical Director, and Owner of Abilities Neurological Rehabilitation. I have over 25 years of experience in both the public and private sectors, and I'm here to help you become the therapist you want to be, supporting people to work towards their dreams and live their best lives. You ready to dive in? Let's go.

Hi there, friend. How are you doing today? As we are recording this, or as I'm recording this, we're about to start summer, and I'm getting ready to really solidify some plans that kind of take advantage of this amazing season we're about to start.

I don't know about you, but I love summer, especially summer in British Columbia. And I love spending my time here. This is not the time that I think is the time to jet set to other countries or even other areas. This is the time to spend right here where we are.

So today I'm excited to share some perspective that I've gained about giving and getting negative feedback. And I'm excited to share it because I see it a lot in our industry. And I think because we tend to be so relationship-focused, it can be both an amazing superpower and at times a liability.

Because we care so much about people, we care about hurting their feelings, especially when we might have some negative feedback to share. And that can be with a client or a patient, a colleague, or just another person that we're working with in general.

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Some people I notice do seem to be better at this naturally than others. And I'm actually here to say that sharing feedback was not something that I've ever actually really liked, especially negative feedback.

I mean, who doesn't like to share positive feedback? But negative feedback has not been something that I found really easy. But it's something that I've had to work on in my career, especially as it's progressed, and especially still as Abilities has grown as an organization.

It's really not okay for me to avoid conflict like I did in the past. So necessity bears innovation, so here I am. And at the same time, I never want to be intentionally cruel or mean. And I know that you don't either, otherwise you wouldn't be listening to this podcast episode.

So today I wanted to share some tips on giving and getting negative feedback to make it a little bit easier than maybe before you listened to this episode. These are things that I think about both when giving and getting this kind of feedback, and it's been super helpful for me.

But before I share my perspective, I know you already know this, but this podcast is a passion project of mine because I really do want all clinicians to have this ability to use this kind of tool set as a way to magnify their impact, even if they never work either alongside us at Abilities or with us at Abilities.

I consider myself so lucky to be able to do this kind of project as part of my week and to share it with you. This is one of my most fun parts of my work week. And so you can help this make it so much more meaningful by helping to spread the message. More clicks helps more clients and more clinicians. So let's work together, if we can, to make that happen.

So you can practically do that in a couple of ways. One, if you can follow, rate and review this podcast, and that helps feed that algorithm. I don't know much about the algorithm, but I know it helps the algorithm. That ultimately, when a clinician is searching for something like this, this kind of podcast will come up.

And second, if you can share this podcast or better yet, a favorite episode, maybe this is one of your favorite episodes, with a colleague that would be even

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more amazing. If you've heard this before, and you meant to do it, but you haven't done it, it's okay. Let this be the sign. Today's the day that you can help other clinicians just like you.

And if this is your first episode, welcome. Thank you so much for listening. And hopefully, as you listen to this episode, you can start to think about who of your clinical friends you would love to hear more of this kind of information to help them at work. Thank you again so much in advance for your action here. And with that, let's get back to this episode.

So first, let's talk about giving negative feedback. So I have some three tips, which are actually three tips with a bonus tip for you when you're thinking about giving negative feedback. And my first tip is to, one, do give feedback yourself to the person whenever possible. And I say that because that really is the most effective way for the other person to use that feedback.

Now, I know it's easier said than done. But notice if you don't, that's a really amazing opportunity to ask yourself why. And I know when I reflected on that, it was often because of the uncomfortable feelings I actually would have as I was giving negative feedback. So that's okay to have those negative feelings. And it's not even a reason to not do it. But I do know it's much more effective when the feedback comes from the person that is giving that feedback versus using a third party.

Notice how you, secondly, and the person you're wanting to give feedback are feeling in the moment. So what I mean by that is the second tip is all about connecting with your nervous system. It is really hard to give and also to receive feedback when either one of you are in a dysregulated nervous system place. And we say that just because the teachable moment isn't always right then and there.

So if you are feeling really heated in that moment, it probably isn't the time to give the feedback. And if you're in a more regulated state, but you're noticing that the person that you want to give it back is not in a regulated state, maybe they had a bad day, maybe something else has happened, it doesn't matter why but just notice that you don't have to do it in that moment.

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You can ask yourself, does it really need to happen now? And unless the feedback they're giving is about something that is inherently unsafe or illegal, the answer is probably no. And if you still have the urge, notice if you have an urge to give it anyways. And it's that opportunity for you to question yourself of why that might be.

The third tip that I have is to decide ahead of time the values that are really important to you on who you want to be and then how you want to give any kind of feedback, especially negative feedback.

Now, if you don't have a value that comes to mind, clear and kind is my kind of go-to. And when I say that, what I mean is I want to be clear for both of us and kind to both of us, both to myself and the other person when I'm giving the feedback. So what I do is I like to think about the feedback until it feels very clear to me and very kind to myself. And when I think about giving it, it feels kind to the other person as well.

And ironically, often that will help me to know that I am in a regulated state. When it feels clear and kind for me and the other person, I'm probably more regulated.

So the fourth item I want to give, this is my bonus tip, is negative feedback can be face-to-face. And sometimes we have almost like a hierarchy that that's better, but it isn't always better. So face-to-face doesn't have to be the way that you give your feedback. You just want to consider your comfort and the person you're giving the negative feedback to when you're considering it.

So this is where sometimes I'll often email my feedback first so that the person has time and space to consider it, first of all, at a time that works for them. And then hopefully in a way that's more clear, they can refer back to it again and again. And then I offer a meeting face-to-face after. So I'm not kind of blowing them without any prior knowledge. They know what we're going to talk about before we're doing it.

And I'll have to say, power dynamics play a role in this also. So if you can be construed as having more power in the relationship, then I would just offer that's

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a time you want to be more considerate about how you deliver any kind of negative feedback.

So lean on your current understanding of them and then make your best guess as to how to proceed. You might not be right, but you will be closer because you've intentionally given yourself time and space to consider both yourself and them when you're giving negative feedback.

So next, let's talk about some tips about getting negative feedback. And I have a few more tips about that because often those who have a hard time giving negative feedback also have a hard time receiving it. I'm putting my hand up as well. I'm also that person. It's hard to receive it without getting defensive and then blaming the person who's giving the feedback or deciding in advance it must all be true, like a cloak of shame.

So here are some tips to lend to a healthier middle ground than it's all on them or all on yourself. So when you're getting some kind of negative feedback, again, whenever possible try to get it back from the original source, even if you hear it from a third party.

And I say that because every time that feedback passes through another person, it's just like the telephone game you may have played as a youngster. Our brain makes that feedback mean something different. So you're getting a perspective of another perspective that may be from another perspective. So when you can get it back from the original source, I want to offer that kind of feedback is probably going to be more true, or at least true to them.

Secondly, it really is okay to ask to move that kind of feedback to another time or place. If you notice as somebody is giving you negative feedback that you're not in a great place to receive it, it is always okay to ask to pause or to do it at a different place. Just consider what is comfortable for you.

Thirdly, you want to be able to be ready to receive the feedback as neutrally as possible. So some things that might be perceived as negative can be more easy to receive and process. And when I say that, receive and process, what I mean is to process it at the same time. But if it feels really negative, and you get to decide what your brain is perceiving as more negative. That could sound like a

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fact, but it really is a thought, meaning that your more negative to you might not be the same kind of negative to someone else. But you might not be able to receive the feedback and process it at the same time. That's totally okay.

I like to think about it when I'm doing that, to take the feedback, if I can't move it to another time or place, is to think about receiving the words and putting it in a metaphorical box to look at at a later time. And I like to do that because then I'm just focusing on receiving the feedback and I can think about processing it later.

When you are ready to consider the feedback, I like to think of feedback as kind of like clothing. I like to take the feedback one by one. It might be one sentence at a time or one idea at a time. I like to think about taking it out of the metaphorical box, trying it on and seeing how it feels. Does it feel true to you? Is there any way that it does feel true to you?

Just notice how it feels as you kind of try it on. And then just like clothing, you get to decide what part of that feedback do you want to keep and examine? And what kind of feedback do you want to compassionately release? What kind of feedback do you want to put back in the box and maybe into the recycle bin or the trash bin?

It is okay to not feel great when you receive negative feedback, especially about something that you either said or did, whether that's intentional or unintentional. It's okay to not feel that great. I would just offer to stay with that feeling and to process those feelings. And you can do that processing on your own, or depending on how painful it is, you can do that with a trusted friend, a coach, or some other mental health professional that, again, you know and trust that can be that compassionate witness to you.

I just say that it's really important to process those feelings because it's after you've processed those feelings that can help you at times to then put those feedback back on as that like metaphorical clothing to try on or to not try on.

Just like not all clothing is going to be for you, the feedback might not be for you as well. Feel free to take it off even if it feels true. The feedback may be true, but the feedback isn't actually you. That could be the difference between guilt, which

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most people identify as I've done something wrong, and shame, which is I am something wrong. It's something from I did something bad to I am bad.

It's okay to make mistakes and to not be perfect, even as a clinician. Just use it as an opportunity to learn. And if you're interested in diving deeper about that, about taking negative feedback and taking that as failure, I would turn you to episode number 53, How to Fail as a Clinician and Not Die, to learn much more about that.

So with that, give it a try. Let's do this because as we get better collectively at both giving and getting negative feedback, I just want to offer that that's going to elevate our industry as a whole. And it's specifically going to help you create a bigger impact for yourself and for those that you serve, your clients or your patients.

Giving and receiving negative feedback is a critical skill. You don't need to master it all at once. And ultimately, you are going to find your unique way to navigate feedback that aligns with your values. So give it a try and let me know how it goes. Yes, I do want to hear from you. I am busy. Of course, I'm busy, but I'm never too busy to chat with you. Feel free to send me an email at [heather@abilitiesrehabilitation.com](mailto:heather@abilitiesrehabilitation.com) and let's chat about it.

With that, I hope you have an amazing rest of your day and I will talk to you next week. See you soon.

If you enjoyed today's show and don't want to worry about missing an episode, you can follow the show wherever you listen to your podcasts. And if you haven't already, I would really appreciate it if you could leave a rating and review to let me know what you think and to help others find *Clinicians Creating Impact*.

It doesn't have to be a five-star rating, although I sure hope you love the show. I'd really want your honest feedback so I can create an awesome podcast that provides tons of value. To learn more about me and the work that I do, visit my website at [www.abilitiesrehabilitation.com/clinicianscorner](http://www.abilitiesrehabilitation.com/clinicianscorner) to download your free Getting it All Done at Work process and to see what I'm up to. Thanks so much.



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Thanks for joining me this week on the *Clinicians Creating Impact* podcast. Want to learn more about the work I'm doing with Abilities Rehabilitation? Head on over to [abilitiesrehabilitation.com](http://abilitiesrehabilitation.com). See you next week.