

Is It Mistreatment?: Practices for Productive Teacher-Learner Interactions

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Mistreatment is complicated...

- It is personal and involves perception.¹
- It is not limited to negative feedback or confrontation.
- It can occur unintentionally during interactions.

	EMPHASIZE interactions more likely to be perceived as SUPPORTIVE	AVOID interactions more likely to be perceived as MISTREATMENT
<p>Apply behaviors that are PROFESSIONAL</p> <p>Emphasize interactions that are constructive, appropriate to the encounter, and not shame-inducing²</p>	<p>EMPHASIZE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing feedback on strategies for improvement—not just faults or weaknesses Focusing criticism on the behavior needing improvement Basing critique on direct observation and performance 	<p>AVOID</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing feedback on mistakes without providing suggestions or means for correction Focusing criticism on the learner's faults on a personal level Basing critique on value judgments or inferences
<p>Apply behaviors that are RESPECTFUL</p> <p>Engage learners using methods that allow them to recognize you as their advocate</p>	<p>EMPHASIZE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing a calm, measured amount of criticism Conveying criticism in suitable settings—privately when needed Providing input early enough to allow time for improvement 	<p>AVOID</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing emotionally charged, rushed, overwhelming criticism Conveying criticism in public when privacy is more appropriate Blindsiding learner with criticism too late for improvement
<p>Apply behaviors that are HUMANISTIC</p> <p>Be deliberate in your sensitivity to learner values, culture, and background</p>	<p>EMPHASIZE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrating sensitivity to learner vulnerability Making suggestions tailored to learners as individuals Extending equal learning opportunities and benefits to all 	<p>AVOID</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploiting power differential to control learners Making offhand remarks that stereotype learners Discriminating in treatment based on gender, race, ADA* factors, or other protected classes
<p>Apply behaviors of an EXPERT TEACHER</p> <p>Use teaching methods that reflect validated techniques</p>	<p>EMPHASIZE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focusing on relevant learner skills integral to the task Focusing on skills that are under the learner's control Providing orientation and direction appropriate to the task 	<p>AVOID</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing vague, confusing, or task-irrelevant instruction Focusing criticism on areas (e.g., environmental, programmatic) beyond the learner's control Assuming expectations are obvious to the learner without direction

*ADA, Americans with Disabilities Act

AVOID these unproductive attitudes and strategies

- **Offensive/misinterpreted behaviors:** Touching, vulgarity, or personal errands
- **Overgeneralizations:** Concluding that differences in perception mean someone will inevitably be offended, so why attend to words so closely
- **Personalizations:** Conveying the sentiment that mistreatment prepared you for life
- **Frustrations:** Sharing regrets that learners are simply oversensitive to any criticism
- **Complaints:** Using generational differences or political correctness as a justification for mistreatment
- **Ignoring learners/avoiding feedback:** Sidestepping difficult feedback conversations, which is unhelpful and often viewed as dismissive³
- **Relying too heavily on humor:** Joking as a means to build camaraderie, but which may be misinterpreted, may be at another's or a group's expense, and may be offensive

References:

1. Gan R, Snell L. When the learning environment is suboptimal: Exploring medical students' perceptions of "mistreatment." *Acad Med.* 2014;89:608-617.
2. Bynum WE 4th, Artino AR Jr, Uijtdehaage S, Webb AMB, Varpio L. Sentinel emotional events: The nature, triggers, and effects of shame experiences in medical residents. *Acad Med.* 2019;94:85-93.
3. Buery-Joyner SD, Ryan MS, Santen SA, Borda A, Webb T, Cheifetz C. Beyond mistreatment: Learner neglect in the clinical teaching environment. *Medical Teacher.* 2019;41:949-955.

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