

How to Give Constructive Feedback

Module Reader # 1



You are working on a team project in your Spanish class. You have to research and give a presentation about a Spanish-speaking country your team would like to visit. Belinda volunteered to draw pictures for your poster. When she brings the pictures to class, you don't think they are very good. What can you do or say?

Your friend Rosie is not doing well in social studies. She never handed in some of the assignments, and didn't study for the last few tests. You know she could do better if she tried harder. She tells you she is worried about failing the class. What can you do or say?



Isaiah, a boy in your class, is making fun of a new kid at your school. He says rude things to him during lunch and criticizes his hair and clothes. Isaiah threw a snowball in his face yesterday and other kids laughed. You can see that Isaiah is making the new kid feel pretty bad. What can you say to Isaiah?

How Do You Know What To Say?

Would you know what to say in these situations? Sometimes it's easier to ignore a problem than deal with it. But problems don't usually go away—they just get bigger, and then it's harder to act. It takes real maturity to know what's right and do it.

Remember that the goal of *constructive criticism* is to construct, or build—not tear down, settle a score, or get back at someone. You want to help them do better. You want to persuade, not punish. Your purpose is to help them improve.

Action Steps: The Right Time, The Right Place, and The Right Way

1. The right time

Plan ahead what you will say. Try to pick a time when you won't be interrupted or distracted by television, videos, or cell phones. It is best if neither one of you is too tired or stressed.



2. The right place

Constructive criticism is always better face to face—not by text, email or phone call! It's very easy to misunderstand a text message or email. Have this conversation privately—just between the two of you, if possible. Try not to correct someone in front of others.

3. The right way

- Be a good listener. Pay attention to what the other person says.
- Speak with gentleness. Think the best about the other person—don't be quick to find fault. If they can tell that you are motivated by concern, and that you are not being quick to judge them, they will know, and will be more open to what you say.
- Don't make assumptions about the other person's motives. If you're not sure, it's better to ask a question ("Is there some reason why you haven't studied for the last few tests?") to find out why your friend is acting as he or she does.
- Use "I messages" such as "I have noticed...it seems to me..."
- Try to find something to thank them for first. Express appreciation for something done right (be specific). "Good job on that rim shot, Benny!" or "I like the colors you picked for that picture."
- Be specific. "I think that throwing the snowball at the new kid really humiliated him. What do you think?"

