Really responding

Top tips for responding to feedback

Feedback from people about services comes in many forms. How health and care organisations respond to that feedback can have a big and lasting impact on how people feel about the organisation and service.

Getting into the right mindset before you respond can help you ensure those who have taken the time and effort to give you feedback feel listened to and heard. These tips may help, whether you are responding to a complaint, a feedback report from an external organisation, your own organization's involvement exercise, or comments online.

If you are responding to a report from Involving People or a local Healthwatch, write your response as though for the public, because that is where your response will end up.

1 Acknowledge feedback positively

People have taken the time and effort to give you feedback. Say a sincere thank you for providing you with this. Whether the feedback is positive or negative, treat it as 'gold dust'. It can be an invaluable resource for you and a driver for improvement.

2 Listen with an open mind

People's feedback may not reflect how the service is supposed to operate, or how it thinks it is operating. But people's experience is their reality and should be acknowledged as such.
Listen with an open mind. Don't say 'that can't have happened'. Say 'that shouldn't have happened'. Then find out why it happened, or why the person perceived that was happening. And learn from it.

3 Sound human

People can find large organisations intimidating. Bear that in mind when you respond. As well as being a representative of your organisation, remember also to respond as a fellow human being. People will value that enormously. Show that you are taking the feedback seriously. Don't be defensive. Explain who you are and make sure it is clear why you are responding. Provide other named contact details if you need to. Tailor your response to the circumstances rather than sound scripted. Be polite. Don't use jargon.

4 Be honest

Be honest about what you can and can't do, and by when.
Show understanding and empathy, and where appropriate offer reassurance and say how you will use the feedback to improve things. Apologise if something was wrong.

5 Answer the real need

Keep responses to the point – answer the real need or concern. Keep explanations clear and relevant. People see through waffle and 'switch off' to swathes of information so will miss the pertinent bits.

6 Be timely

Respond in good time – meet your organisational standards at a minimum. Say when you will next update people on progress.

7 Walk in the person's shoes before replying

Read the response back and think about whether, if you were the members of the public/the patient/the family member/ the carer, you would be satisfied if you received this response. Think about times when you have had a good response when you have raised an issue. Would your response meet that standard?

These tips have been developed from experience of working with organisations to respond to feedback.

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