

Communication & Group Dynamics Tips

Practical strategies for clinical educators and preceptors

Why It Matters

How you communicate shapes whether students ask questions, share their reasoning, and admit uncertainty. Support does not mean lowering expectations - it makes participation and improvement possible.

Start with a quick conversation



- Learn names, experience levels, goals, and areas for practice.
- Clarify expectations for communication, participation, and patient care.
- Explain when learners can work independently and when they must ask.

A few minutes can prevent confusion later.

"I don't expect you to know everything. I do expect you to ask when you are unsure or concerned."



During the Clinical Day

Keep Communication Open

- Listen fully before correcting or redirecting.
- Ask open-ended questions that reveal thinking.
- Acknowledge useful observations and ideas.
- Use brief check-ins instead of waiting until day's end.

"What are you noticing?"

"Walk me through your thinking."

"What support would help?"

Encourage Everyone to Participate

- Pause long enough for students to think.
- Invite input without putting someone on the spot.
- Ask students to build on one another's ideas.
- Redirect a dominant speaker respectfully.

"Let's hear another perspective."

"Take a moment, then we'll compare ideas."



When Group Challenges Arise

1 One Student Dominates

Acknowledge the contribution, then invite other voices: "Let's pause and hear what others are considering."

2 A Student is Quiet

Provide thinking time and invite participation without requiring an immediate response. "Take a moment. I'd like to hear what each of you is noticing."

3 Students Disagree

Move from personalities to evidence: "What evidence supports each approach?"

4 The Group is Stuck

Help them reset: "What do we know, what remains uncertain, and what would help us move forward?"



When a Student is Incorrect

Stay curious → explore the reasoning → identify what worked → clarify what needs adjustment → agree on the next step.

Correct promptly and clearly when patient safety is involved. Focus on the reasoning, decision, or behavior, not the person.

A useful rule: Be clear about expectations, curious about learners' thinking, and respectful when redirecting.

If you would like to learn more

Burgess, A., van Diggele, C., Roberts, C., & Mellis, C. (2020). Facilitating small group learning in the health professions. *BMC Medical Education*, 20, Article 457.

Carr, A. N. M., Kirkwood, R. N., & Petrovski, K. R. (2022). Effective veterinary clinical teaching in a variety of teaching settings. *Veterinary Sciences*, 9(1), Article 17.

Hardie, P., O'Donovan, R., Jarvis, S., & Redmond, C. (2022). Key tips to providing a psychologically safe learning environment in the clinical setting. *BMC Medical Education*, 22, Article 816.