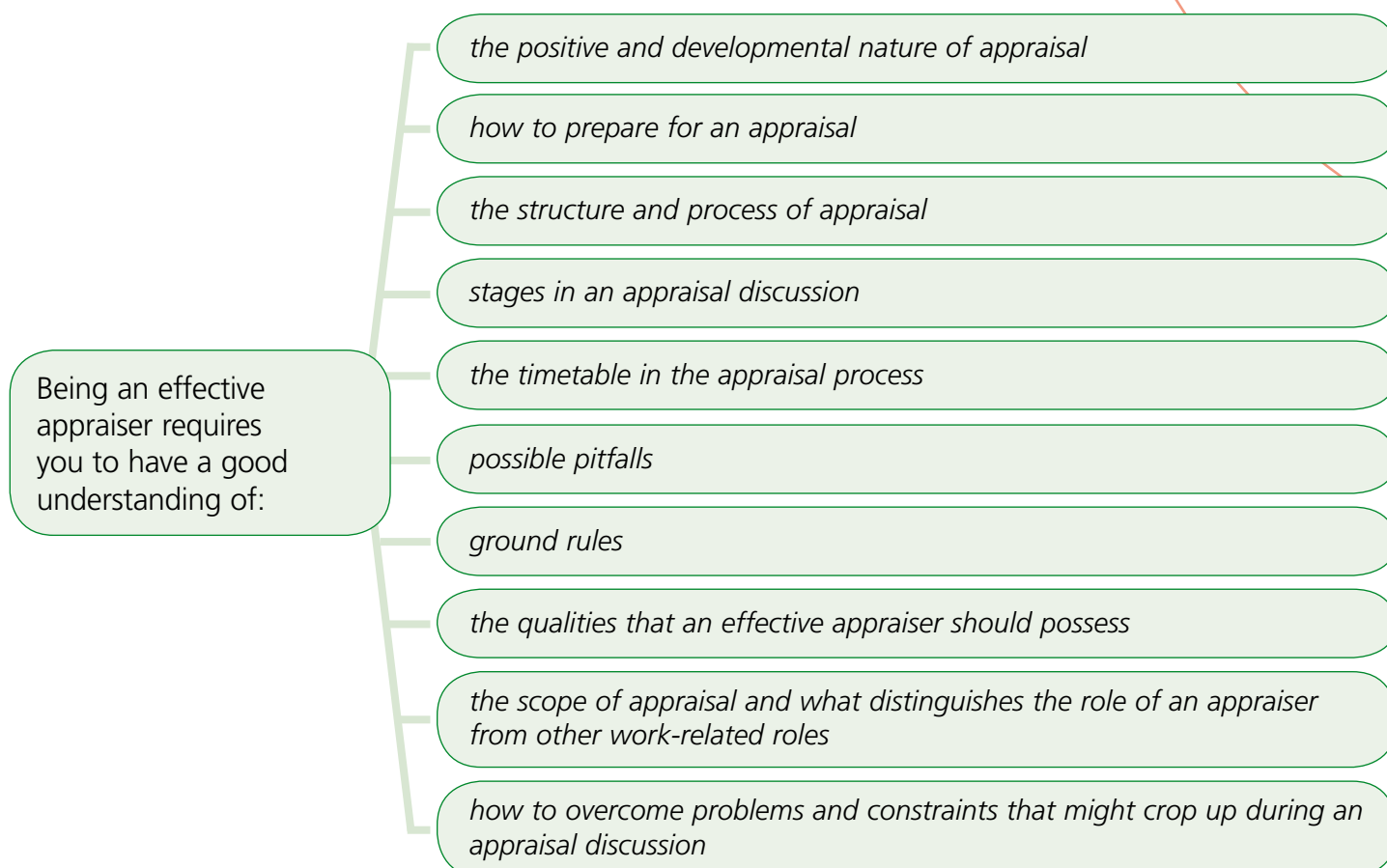


How to give constructive feedback: being an effective appraiser

Appraisers must take their responsibility seriously and prepare well for each appraisal, in order to do justice to each unique professional conversation. They should keep themselves up-to-date, not only with the clinical and non-clinical requirements of their own professional role, but also with any developments of the appraisal process in their practice or primary care trust (PCT). They should also keep up-to-date with any new approach to quality assurance of continuing professional development (CPD).¹



An effective appraiser will:

- *use description not judgement*
- *keep it friendly – verbally and non-verbally*
- *identify and reinforce strengths*
- *exactly define and mutually agree on problems*
- *collect objective evidence*
- *collaborate on constructive solutions*
- *identify and use 'carrots and sticks' to make it happen*
- *not capitulate on the standards.*

Here are some ideas of what you should be aiming for in the appraisal process with those you are appraising.²

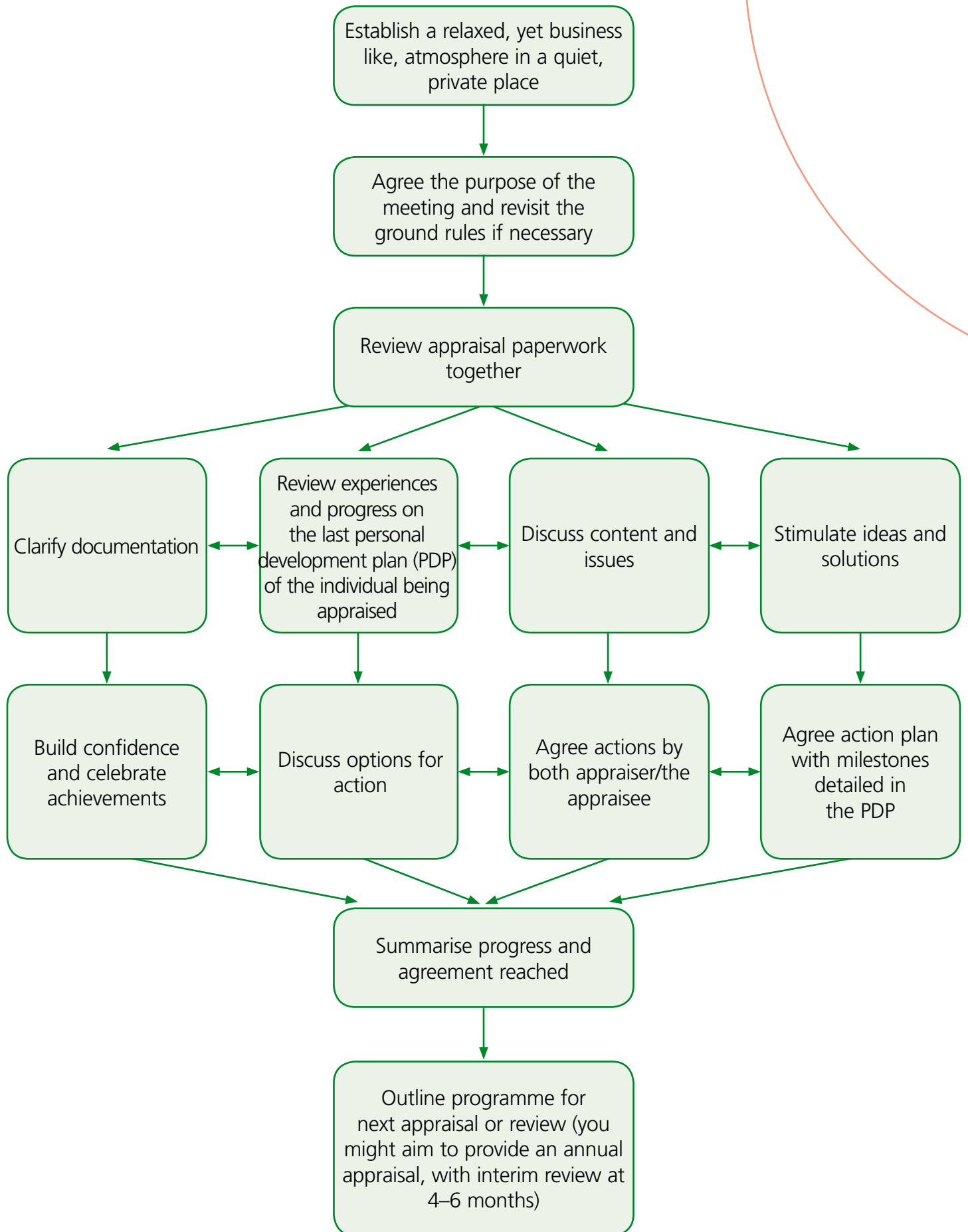
- *The general practice nurse (GPN) whom you are appraising needs to meet regularly with you. You need to look at the best schemes and make sure progress is reviewed frequently – annual reviews are insufficient.*
- *Nothing should come as a shock at a formal appraisal interview – ongoing feedback should be a regular feature in people's everyday work in the NHS.*
- *Appraisal is not a substitute for day-to-day supervision, support and feedback on performance.*
- *Appraisers have an ongoing responsibility to ensure that the people they appraise can achieve the agreed objectives and, where necessary, give or direct them to help.*
- *The GPN being appraised plays a major part in setting his or her objectives. However, these must be set within the overall framework of what staff in their post and grade are expected to achieve or be able to demonstrate.*
- *Self-assessment is an important part of appraisal, but the appraiser must curb the tendency of individuals being appraised to be unreasonably self-critical.*
- *Appraisal interviews are best conducted on a one-to-one basis.*
- *Any promised level of confidentiality should be respected – the only exception to this is where aspects of poor performance come to light when the appraiser has a professional responsibility to protect patients – this proviso should be made explicit at the start of the appraisal process.*

Preparing for the appraisal session as an appraiser

As an appraiser, it is important that you are as well prepared for each meeting as those you are appraising.¹⁻³ It is primarily your responsibility to set out an agenda and guide the meeting. Figure 1 may provide you with some structure to help to move the meeting forward. Providing a relaxed atmosphere is crucial, but equally it is important not to spend too much time chatting before you move onto the purpose of the appraisal meeting.

Remember that issues should be explored from the perspectives of the GPN being appraised and those of your practice, PCT or the NHS as a whole. Keep clarifying what is being said in order that you both share the same perspectives and to obtain a full picture. At the end of the meeting, it is important that the actions are agreed by both of you.

Figure 1: The process of the appraisal meeting – from the appraiser’s perspective



Types of questions to ask

The range of questions you might pose when you review progress from the last appraisal and/or review of a GPN's Personal Development Plan (PDP) might include:

- *what did you actually do?*
- *what had you hoped to achieve?*
- *what did you actually achieve?*
- *did any learning points crop up unexpectedly?*
- *how would you describe the personal benefits?*
- *what do you think you could do next to build on your achievements?*

Timetable for the appraisal process

As an appraiser it is important that you prepare appropriately for the appraisal to ensure all parties get the most benefit from it. Below are details of what you need to know and have prepared:

- *on an ongoing basis*
- *3 weeks before the appraisal (at the latest)*
- *1 week before the appraisal*
- *at the appraisal*
- *after the appraisal.*

On an ongoing basis

- **Know the full details** of the way the appraisal process and systems operate in your practice or trust.
- **Know how and when** you will undertake appraisal, how those being appraised will be notified and sent appraisal forms to complete.
- **Consider if your training** as an appraiser has been **sufficient**, or if you have learning needs – and address them if so.

3 weeks before the appraisal (at the latest)

- **Plan** for the appraisal meeting:
 - know where the meeting will take place (in a quiet room where you are unlikely to be disturbed)
 - book a convenient time and private place where you will not be interrupted
 - set aside at least 1 hour
 - make sure you have allowed plenty of time for the session and that, as far as you can, you will be able to be punctual
 - reserve a time when you are both free from other commitments – it cannot be done in the corner of a busy room when you are both busy with lots of other people listening.
- **Communicate** with the person you are appraising:
 - give them plenty of warning of the date and time of the meeting
 - explain what you expect from them
 - remind them of the purpose of the review.

- **Collate** paperwork:
 - check you have a copy of their job description (if appropriate) and any relevant documentation relating to their work or performance
 - make sure you have a copy of their previous appraisal (if relevant) agreed PDP and any past objectives.
- **Gather** information:
 - facts and figures on past and recent performance, as appropriate
 - feedback from other individuals with whom the person works by agreement
 - information on possible development opportunities
 - training events or sources of support that may be useful
 - Information from the log book or portfolio of the person being appraised, examination results or qualifications attained, training or courses they have attended, reports or presentations they have given, other colleagues or staff etc.

The proportions of effort both you and those you are appraising put into collating information for appraisal will depend on your local appraisal system. It will also depend on the extent to which you collect subjective and objective information of someone's performance. Swap and share all information available to you both – information about someone's performance should not be revealed for the first time by either of you, when you come to do the appraisal.

1 week before the appraisal (at the latest)

- **Reflect** on the paperwork you have gathered and the contents of the individual's completed appraisal form.
- **Draw up** the meeting structure, describing the tasks and objectives to discuss and agree with the individual being appraised.

At the appraisal

- **Create an informal and relaxed atmosphere**, and put the person being appraised at ease.
- **Explain the purpose** and timing of the appraisal meeting, and what outcomes you expect.
- **Agree the 'ground rules'**, including any limits set on confidentiality (such as belief that patient safety may be at risk).
- **Share your intended agenda** and invite the person being appraised to add any issues or items.
- **Discuss how you will be taking notes**, and what will happen to your records.
- **Encourage** the person being appraised to review his/her performance as you talk through achievements of their previous PDP.
- Let the **person being appraised do most of the talking**.
- Follow your **pre-prepared structure**, but be flexible and vary the timing according to the other person's needs.

Some prompts to reflect on during the appraisal:

- *national and local priorities*
- *review of any significant event analysis*
- *review of audits and protocol developments*
- *review of prescribing data and referral data*
- *working relationships with colleagues*
- *any feedback from or involvement from patients*
- *last year's PDP and goals set within it.*

- **Discuss the person's performance**, focussing on facts and avoiding subjective judgements. You could structure discussion around the three domains of: knowledge, skills and attitudes, or the core competences of the specialty, discipline or post of the person you are appraising.
- **Give feedback by emphasising positive points** and encouraging him/her to reflect on and value achievements.
- **Discuss any areas where his/her performance could have been improved** and why – issues may be personal, operational or relate to the limited availability of resources or training opportunities.
- **Discuss possible career paths** or first steps and how the person being appraised views them.
- **Jointly agree the objectives** for a future PDP based on the appraisal discussion.
- **Jointly agree what training and development needs** have been identified and encourage the person being appraised to make a realistic plan.
- **Summarise what has been agreed** – the other person first and you as appraiser afterwards reaffirming, revising or adding. Reinforce their strengths and opportunities, and the ways you have jointly identified for them to resolve problems and address their needs.
- **Agree** their plan for the future.
- **Agree the next steps** – the timescale for writing-up documentation, an interim review date, the next appraisal date, etc. Some appraisers organise the appraisal session so that they have a short break in which to reflect at the end of the appraisal, then complete paper records and share this report with the person being appraised.

After the appraisal

- **Complete paperwork** and share a copy with those you have appraised.
- **Feedback appraisal information** in an anonymous way to the primary care organisation to inform its planning process. It may be that the clinical governance lead in your trust or organisation has a central role in this process, collating appraisal information from the workforce to see how this fits in with the organisation's various strategies.
- **Organise an interim review** as appropriate – a phone call to check on progress or resolution of issues, a face-to-face meeting for more substantial concerns, etc.

Tackling problems arising from an appraisal or a review

The table below shows how you might tackle problems arising from reviews and appraisals.

Problems arising from reviews and appraisals	
Problem	Solution
Lack of time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the time needed realistically and plan for it
Conflict of interests if the appraiser is the 'line manager' of the GPN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify your relationship – if it is impossible to establish sufficient trust, then you need to find a different match between GPN and appraiser
Strained relationship between appraiser and GPN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree the boundaries to develop the right balance between empathy and intimacy
Criticism of GPN by appraiser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both should be aware of the sensitivities of the GPN to any criticism and take the utmost care with formal and informal, verbal and non-verbal feedback • Discuss problems analytically without bringing personalities into it • Use a constructive feedback technique • Being descriptive allows you to assume the role of concerned friend and adviser rather than an outraged boss

Problem	Solution
Undue sexual attraction or too much friendliness can cause collusion to obscure proper assessment of the evidence presented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take care to act professionally at all times
GPN feels judged by appraiser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The whole process must be conducted using description and not judgement
GPN has unduly low self-esteem or is too self-critical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and reinforce strengths
Problem areas vague and/or multifactorial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems need exact definitions not generalisations • Encourage the GPN to describe facts and plan to collect objective evidence • Find constructive solutions • Each specific problem area should have an agreed method of targeted training, the setting of objectives to be achieved and specified timescale
Last year's objectives have still to be achieved in whole or part	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify 'carrots and sticks' to help ensure that realistic objectives will be achieved • Troubleshoot subsequent progress • Keep tabs on the situation and give encouragement. <p>By taking these actions, when the time comes for review, everyone is well aware of the expected outcome, and any necessary sanctions can be applied with less confrontation – review regularly until the GPN is back on course</p>
Unyielding in your minimum expectations of good practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take account of inadequate resources and non-personal deficiencies • Undertake to pass these on to the relevant bodies

References

1. Chambers R, Tavabie A, Mohanna K, Wakley G. *The Good Appraisal Toolkit for Primary Care*. Oxford: Radcliffe Publishing; 2004.
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3. Chambers R, Mohanna K, Wakley G, Wall D. *Demonstrating Your Competence as a Healthcare Teacher*. Oxford: Radcliffe Publishing; 2004.