

## Care Skillsbase: Manage Skills

### Talk constructively about skills gaps

#### 1. Create the right climate

The safer and more supported a person feels at work, the easier it is for them to discuss skills gaps and training needs, including communication and number skills.

Managers can help to create a safe, supportive environment simply by interacting respectfully with staff on a day-to-day basis. That includes:

- consulting staff on decisions about their work
- asking staff regularly how they feel about their work
- thanking staff regularly for their contribution to the success of the organisation.

It is also important to encourage staff to:

- ask questions
- think about what they are doing
- use their initiative to solve problems.

When staff make mistakes, explain the problem but avoid showing impatience or anger. Try not to accuse or blame.

Support staff with supervision, feedback and training opportunities.

Whenever possible, allow staff to take on more challenging tasks.

Put skills on the agenda with staff right from the beginning. That means:

- telling staff, from recruitment on, about the skills needed to work safely and meet quality standards
- using Care Skillsbase Skills Checks to make sure staff understand the importance of communication and number skills in care work
- reassuring staff that you will support them with training to fill any skills gaps.

## **2. Focus on the job (and the needs of people who use services) not the member of staff**

If a member of staff does lack the communication and number skills required by a task, focus attention on the needs of the task, not the member of staff's lack of ability. This will help diffuse any tension or anxiety the person may have about their skills.

Start by telling the person what you value about their work.

Ask them how they are feeling about their work.

Identify the task that is concerning you.

Ask the person to explain how they think the task should be done.

If the person does not know what the correct procedure is, explain it. Point out where communication and number skills need to be applied and why.

Once you have established how these skills should be applied, explain the ways in which you consider:

- the person is not applying the skills effectively
- failure to apply the skills effectively stops the person from achieving the outcomes required
- others, including people who use the service, suffer negative consequences.

Ask if the person feels this assessment of their performance is fair and accurate.

To be sure the issue is skills and not attitude, check that the person is:

- committed to achieving the required outcomes
- prepared to follow the agreed procedure in order to achieve the outcomes
- willing to apply the skills to the best of their ability.

Reiterate to the person what you value about their work.

Say that it is important that they are able to work safely and meet quality standards in the task and that to do this they must be able to apply the skills effectively. To help them, you will arrange support and development.

Outline the ways you can support them (see Care Skillsbase: Manage Skills at [www.scie-careskillsbase.org.uk](http://www.scie-careskillsbase.org.uk)) and ask the person what sounds helpful. When you agree a development programme, set achievable goals related to performance in the task that you have been discussing.

Avoid misunderstandings by noting planned actions and when they are to happen. Check that the person agrees (and even initials) your notes.

#### **What is a 'development programme'?**

A development programme is any agreed set of actions that aim to improve a person's performance. It can be anything from simple supervision, observing another colleague, being coached, to undertaking a formal training course.

### **3. Keep in touch during the programme**

Keep in touch with the person during the skills development programme. Check that they are happy with the programme and feel that they are making progress.

#### **4. Acknowledge the improvement afterwards**

Monitor the impact of the programme on their performance of the task and acknowledge any positive impact on their performance of the task and their performance generally.

Draw the person's attention to how their increased effectiveness helps others (i.e. colleagues and the people they are caring for). Encourage any further development the person shows interest in.