

Giving Feedback as the Voice of Lived Experience

It can seem daunting to be “the voice of lived experience” when reviewing policies or proposals, but it can also be a tangible opportunity to expand the power of *expert consultation*!

Below are some steps to help guide your process of providing feedback to stakeholders.

1. Get Into the Zone

Before reviewing a document, carve out time without distractions. Take a few moments to remind yourself of your lived experience in children’s mental health. What experiences can upset you when receiving services or connecting with staff? What experiences are positive and life-changing for your family? You’re being asked to review based on your lived experience, so make sure you tap into that specific mindset. *Think about who the audience is and the purpose of the tool.* If you’re nervous to give feedback, try to shift that energy into excitement! If you’re feeling frustrated with the agency/policy/system, try to shift that energy into curiosity and problem-solving!

2. Gut Check

Now that you’re in the right headspace, read through the entire document. Instead of focusing on grammar and spelling, focus on the bigger concepts. As you read, highlight the words, expressions, or topics that don’t sit right with you, or the ones that you really like to see. We call this a *gut check* because you should go with your first reaction as you read through. Don’t try to put on a professional hat and rewrite, but instead read between the lines and note what parts make you have some big feelings. Have paper next to you to capture your thoughts.

Example: *The word consumer makes me feel like a number, not a person!*

Example: *Front line worker makes me feel like we’re fighting a war.*

Example: *Staff being culturally competent is a good idea, but in real life it just doesn’t play out like what they say!*

3. Summarize

Now that you’ve done a read through, take a few minutes to capture your overall thoughts on the document. It is helpful to share your thoughts for how to make the document better. Here are a few questions to consider when summarizing the document:

- ✓ Does the document reference children and families in a respectful, equitable manner?
- ✓ Are the ideas and concepts positive for children and families? Do you think the ideas proposed will work? If not, why not?
- ✓ Are there ideas or concepts missing that should have been discussed?
- ✓ Would you propose editing any of the language in this document to be most inclusive to children and families?

4. Know What to Focus In On

If you have more time to review, drill down into some specific parts of the document. Don't be afraid to speak your truth! Each document will be different, but here are some general suggestions to go deeper:

- ✓ What aspect of this topic affects children and families the most? Spend time on that element.
- ✓ Have you had a positive experience in a topic area mentioned? Spend some time reflecting on that scenario and share it in a few sentences with the stakeholder you're reviewing for.
- ✓ Have you had a negative experience in a topic area mentioned? Spend some time reflecting on that scenario and share it in a few sentences with the stakeholder you're reviewing for.
- ✓ Based on your own experience, how do you think the vision, outcomes, or goals of the document will happen in real life? Think of this as a *reality check* if the document seems off-base.

5. Remember to Zoom Out and Acknowledge the Positives

Yes, you read that right. Even though it is helpful to *focus in* on a document, remember to once more zoom out on the topic. Now that you've done a deep dive, what are the big picture concepts you want them to take away? As you're preparing your final comments, be sure to include the positive concepts you saw in the document. Remember- there is *always* something positive to make note of!

- ✓ Check to see if you seem to be stuck repeating the same issue. Sometimes we're too close to an experience and our emotions are on high-alert, which can make thinking about the issue triggering and difficult to focus on with a clear head.
- ✓ See if you might be over-generalizing from one terrible event. Sometimes people aren't bumping up against bad policies, but instead have had one bad go of it on an off day.

6. Put It All Together

You have probably spent a lot of time on this document by now, so it's time to start wrapping up your feedback. Stakeholders request feedback in different formats, but if no format was mentioned, feel free to prepare your thoughts as a list and/or in a paragraph format. Your final thoughts should include:

- ✓ Your summary written earlier, updated with some positive notes and a "zoomed-out" perspective.
- ✓ The most notable ideas or concepts highlighted in your gut check.
- ✓ Your story or takeaways on where you focused in.
- ✓ Gratitude in being included in the process.

7. Send it To Stakeholders

This step is so important! If you take the time to review, make sure you send all of your feedback to the right person **on time!** When sending the feedback, you can note that you would like to stay in the loop to see the finalized document, or you can offer to further collaborate and review other items in the future. Stakeholders want your feedback, and whether you have a lot or a little to say, it is beneficial for them to know how you see the document. Plus, you should have a sense of pride knowing that you got to speak on behalf of folks with lived experience to influence this document!