



# WHEN FEEDBACK TRIGGERS STRONG REACTIONS

*Supporting reflection when feedback feels emotionally charged*



Strong reactions to feedback are not a sign that feedback has failed. They are often a sign that the feedback matters.

Feedback can challenge how learners see themselves, particularly when it introduces new information or perspectives that do not align with their self-assessment.

Surprise, discomfort, or defensiveness are **normal responses** in these moments. These reactions are part of learning - not interruptions to it.



## CREATING CONDITIONS FOR SAFETY BEFORE RESPONDING

- Choose a private, low-distraction space
- Avoid delivering challenging feedback in public or rushed settings
- Allow a moment to settle before continuing
- Use brief grounding pauses (silence, breath, check-in)

*These actions support the **Connect** phase by fostering psychological safety.*

### Reframe What Might Be Happening

- Feedback may challenge a learner's self-perception
- Learners may be unsure how to interpret what they are hearing
- Emotional reactions are part of learning

### Attending to reactions beyond silence

Learner reactions are not always verbal. Changes in posture, tone, eye contact, or engagement can signal discomfort or distress.

Noticing these cues is part of effective feedback practice.

They may indicate a need to:

- slow the conversation
- name what you are observing
- offer reassurance or a pause before continuing

### What Helps in the Moment

- Pause and acknowledge emotion. e.g., "I notice this feels uncomfortable. Let's pause for a moment."
- Create space before coaching. e.g., "What feels most challenging right now?"
- Re-anchor to learning purpose. "This feedback is to support your learning, not judge you."
- Delay coaching if needed. "We can come back to this after you've had time to reflect."

*These steps help bridge **Connect** → **Coach**.*

### Inviting Reflection Without Assumptions

- "I'm noticing this feels uncomfortable - do you want to pause or talk about what's coming up?"
- "What stands out for you right now?"
- "Before we move on, how is this landing for you?"

*These invitations support reflection without requiring learners to justify emotions.*

### Reflection Questions for Preceptors

- Did the feedback challenge how the learner sees themselves?
- Did I allow space for reaction before moving toward change?
- Did I attend to verbal and non-verbal responses?
- Does this conversation need follow-up over time?



**Strong reactions invite us to slow down, restore safety, and support reflection - not to stop giving feedback.**