



Scottish  
Ambulance  
Service

Working in Partnership with Universities

**Right Conversation,  
Right Time  
Making feedback count**



Organisational  
Development



# Objectives

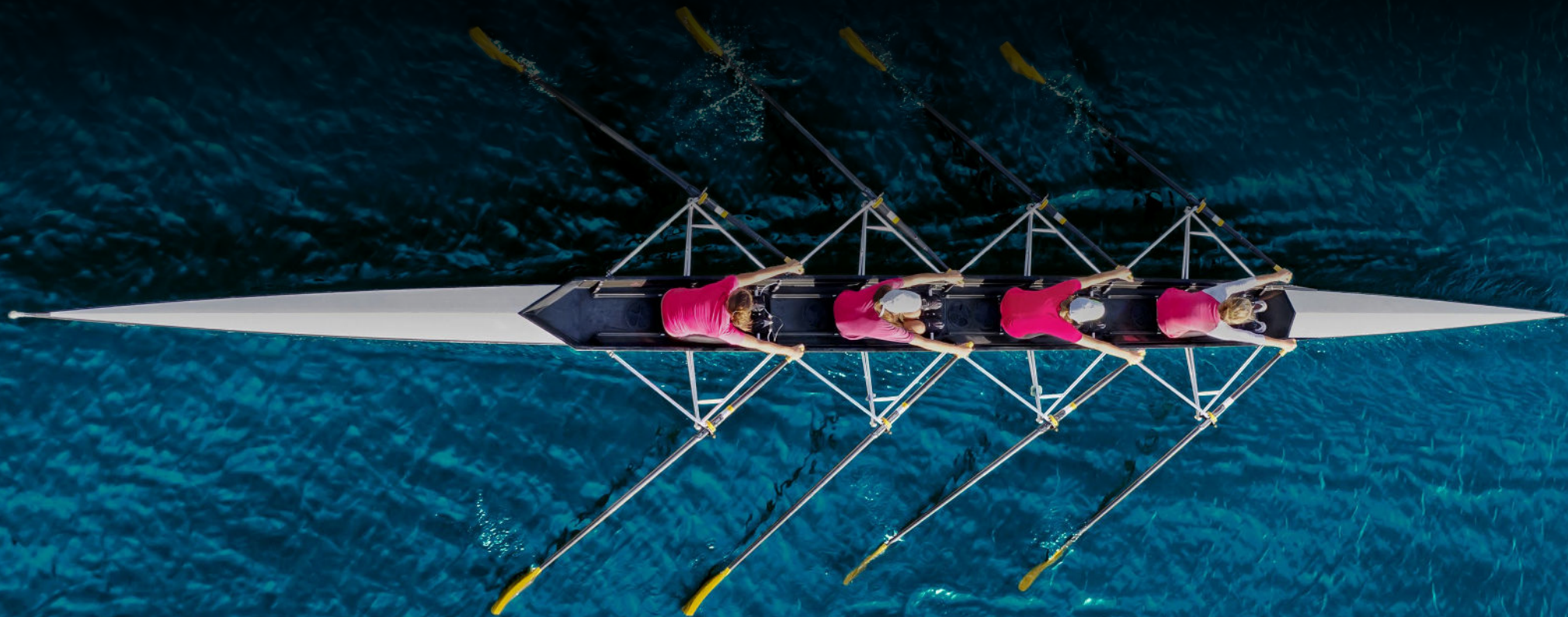
1. Understand the benefits of creating a supportive climate for open and timely conversations
2. Identify common challenges to confident conversations and explore strategies, including managing emotions, to navigate them effectively
3. Learn about tools such as the DESC and SARA models to help structure feedback and effective conversations



**Creating a positive environment with a rich culture of feedback**



**Do you get the team you deserve?**



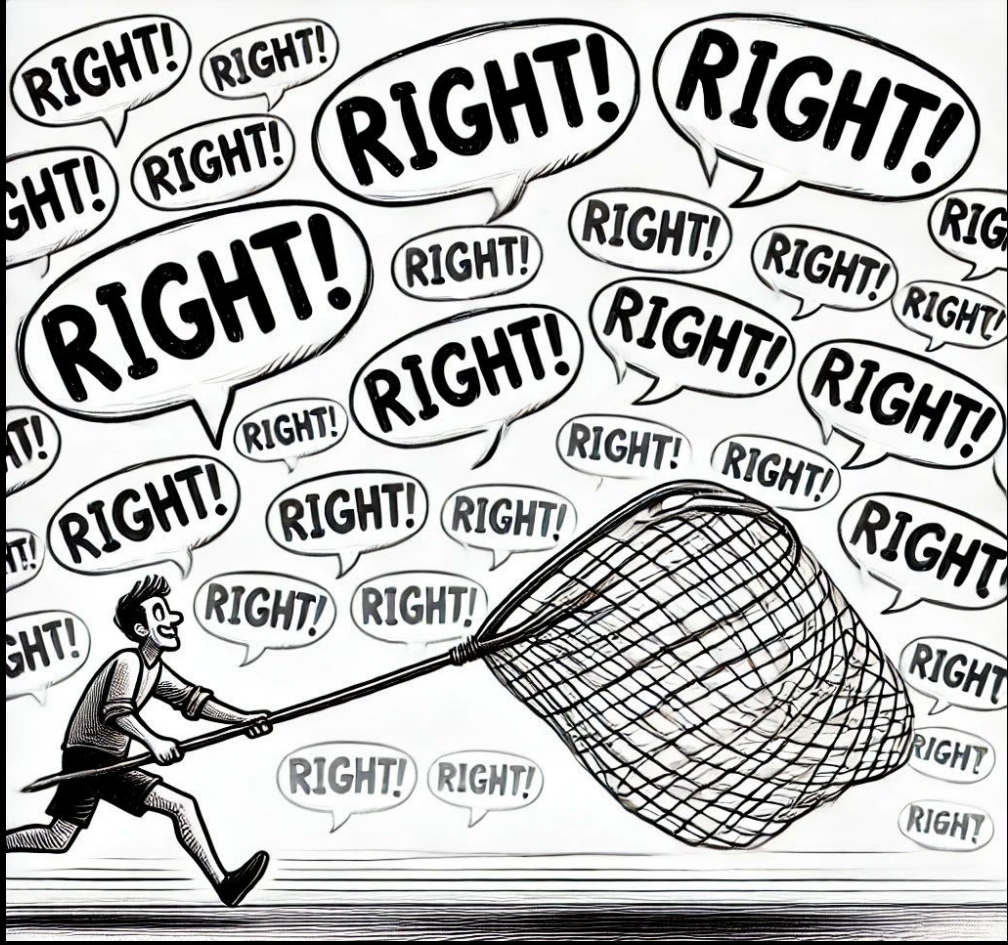
# We all set the tone

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- The way we show up at work—how we speak, listen, and interact—shapes the culture around us
- Whether you lead a team or contribute as part of one, your behaviour creates ripples
- People notice what we encourage, what we let slide, and how we respond in key moments
- Culture isn't just top-down—it's built in every conversation
- We all contribute to psychological safety—by how we speak, how we listen, and how we respond



# Self-reflection: Which one are you?





# These interactions help people to:

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- Become clear on goals and expectations
- Know what they are doing well
- Understand the steps required to improve
- Boost productivity and performance
- Support career development and promotion
- Reduce self-doubt and build confidence
- Resolve issues and tension
- Boost engagement, motivation, and morale
- Build trust, relationships, and psychological safety
- Improve overall well-being

## Pause for reflection...

1. Who has had a chat with their line manager about how you like to receive feedback?
2. How often do you ask for feedback?
3. How specific are you?
4. Do you encourage your team / colleagues to do the same?



# Praise Vs Positive feedback

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**Praise** - General approval or admiration. Focuses on personal traits (e.g., "You're a hard worker")

**Whereas**

**Positive Feedback**

Specific, actionable, and focused on behaviour. Helps the person understand what to repeat or build on

**Key takeaway:** Praise feels good. Positive feedback feels good and drives growth



**Intent:** Intent: Approach feedback with a desire to help the other person grow.



**Supportive:** Delivered in a non-threatening, encouraging manner with consideration for recipients needs.



**Direct & Specific:** Clearly stated, focusing on specific behaviours or events..



**Descriptive:** Focused on behaviour, not personality.



**Helpful:** Intended to provide value to the other person.



**Personal:** Speak for yourself, using "I" statements to convey what you mean.

## Best Practices for Giving Positive and Effective Feedback

**Clarity:** Ensure feedback is understandable and offers specific actions for improvement



**Considerate:** Respectfully delivered, with care and mindfulness.



**Timing:** Delivered as close to the relevant event as possible.



**Encouraging:** Frame feedback to build confidence and inspire positive change.



**Permission:** Given with the other person's consent.



**Follow-up:** Check in to reinforce growth and provide ongoing support.

# Receiving feedback



**Be grateful.** Giving feedback can be just as challenging as receiving it.



**Offer your own suggestions.** Discuss areas where you feel improvement is needed.



**Ask questions.** Clarify suggestions and ask for examples to better understand the feedback..



**Ask questions.** Clarify suggestions and ask for examples to better understand the feedback.



**Share your preferences.** Ask for feedback when you need it most to make it more useful.



**Remove judgment.** Use 'how' questions instead of 'what' to foster constructive dialogue.



**Discuss strengths and growth areas.** The goal is to identify where you can improve.



**Say Thank you.** Let your line manager know you value their feedback and advice.



**Pause before responding.** Focus on what makes sense, not what doesn't right now.



**Avoid being defensive.** Don't argue—consider the feedback and ask yourself if it's truthful.



**Be constructive and specific.** Take control by asking for examples to clarify the feedback.



**Follow-up.** After applying the feedback, check in with your manager or peer to see if improvements are noticed



**Listen.** With an open mind. See feedback as a chance to improve not as a personal attack.



**Act.** Repeated advice is frustrating, so apply the feedback to show improvement.



**You don't have to accept the feedback,** but you owe it to yourself to reflect and evaluate it.



**Summarise the feedback.** Repeat what you heard to ensure you've understood it correctly.



## **'Challenging' conversations**

# Types of challenging conversations?

- Addressing underperformance or unmet expectations
- Addressing inappropriate or unprofessional behaviour
- Resolving interpersonal disputes
- Communicating difficult changes or transitions
- Discussing unpopular decisions or outcomes
- Discussing promotions or career advancement
- Navigating employee relations issues or conflicts
- Providing feedback to own line manager or above
- Missed deadlines or poor time management
- Unwillingness to accept feedback
- Not taking ownership of mistakes
- Not respecting boundaries or personal space
- Dominating discussions / work
- Negative attitude or poor team spirit
- Unreliable or inconsistent work quality
- Not contributing to the workload

# Reflection: What's stopping you?

- 1) What's stopping you having the conversations?
- 2) Which types of challenging conversations resonates with you the most?
- 3) How do these conversations *make* you feel, when you know one is coming?



Image taken from [www.deviantart.com](http://www.deviantart.com)

# What stops you?

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- Not knowing how to start conversation
  - Fear of unknown response (crying, aggression etc.)
  - Reluctance to appear weak
  - Fear of an overly emotional response
  - Anxiety about damaging a relationship
  - Uncertainty about the outcome
  - No-one else has dealt with it previously
  - Lack of understanding of the process
- Fear of confrontation
  - Feeling underprepared, exposed, and vulnerable?
  - Lacking skills (e.g. feedback, listening)
  - When don't agree with the message you need to give
  - Left it so long that it has become much worse
  - Fear of being misunderstood

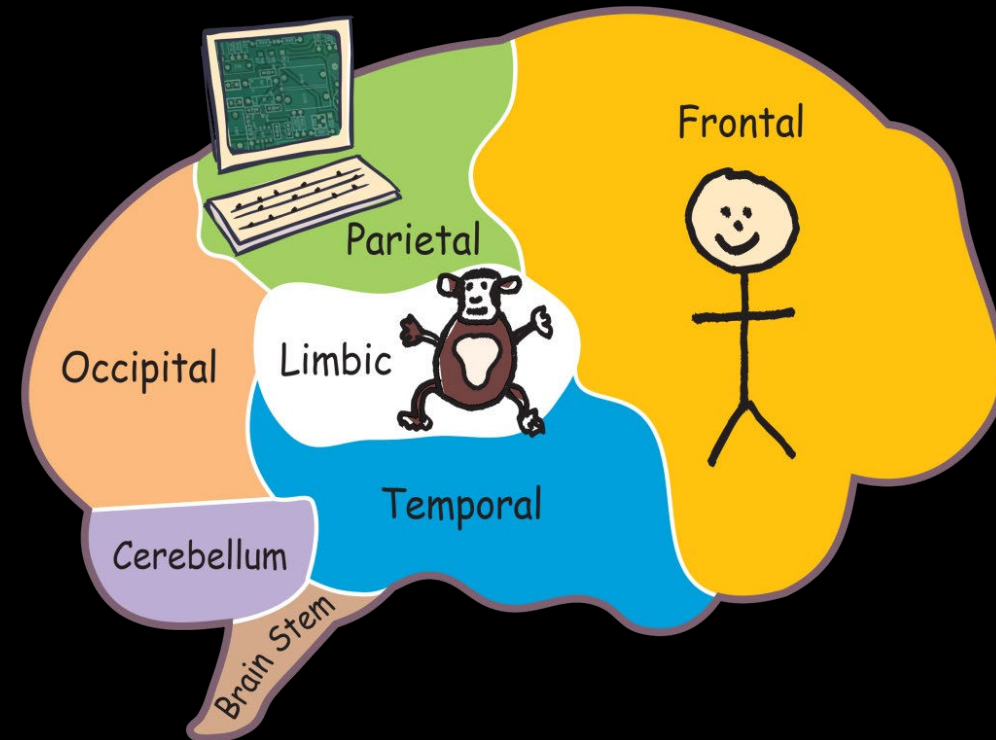


# The Chimp Paradox



# The Chimp Paradox

- The **Chimp** is the emotional, reactive part. It's fast, impulsive, and often takes over when we feel threatened or uncomfortable.
- The **Human** is the calm, logical part — the one we *want* to lead with during a tough conversation.
- And the **Computer** stores our habits and learned behaviours. It can either fuel the Chimp or support the Human, depending on what we've practised.



# Chimp reaction to:

## Giving Feedback

- Put the conversation off
- Show a different range of emotions (fear, frustration, hurt, etc.)
- Overthink and over-prepare
- Convince yourself it's going to be really difficult
- Become irrational, make assumptions
- Brings out poor behaviours
- Overreact to things
- Avoidance of future conversations
- Exaggeration of issues

## Receiving Feedback

- Surprised, taken aback
- Become defensive
- Challenge back – don't see behaviours as an issue
- Deploy deflection tactics
- Offer explanations to support actions or behaviours
- Over-apologising or placating
- Rationalising emotions



## This is your chimp

## This is your human brain

Energy ↑



**SHOCK**

**ANGER**

**RESISTANCE**

**ACCEPTANCE**

### What people say when in SHOCK:

- "I can't believe this is about me"
- "This doesn't make sense at all!"
- "Are you sure there's not a mistake?"
- "Where is this even coming from?"

### What people say while in ANGER:

- "They don't know the full story!"
- "This feedback is biased / unfair!"
- "It's not my fault!"
- "Who said that?"

### What people say in RESISTANCE:

- "That's just how I am, people need to accept it."
- "I've always done it this way, and it works for me."
- "I understand, but I'm not sure it applies to me"

### What people say in ACCEPTANCE:

- "How can I best use this feedback?"
- "What can I do to improve?"
- "What resources are available to help me make this change?"

# Strategies for dealing with your chimp

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- **Pause and Breathe** – Simple but powerful. This creates space between the trigger and your reaction
- **Name the Emotion** – When we name it, we tame it. It helps us shift from reacting to reflecting.
- **Reframe** – Ask yourself, what's my Chimp assuming right now
- **Vent Privately** – It's okay to step away. You don't have to fix it in one go
- **Focus on the Facts** – Stick with what's observable — not what we've assumed
- **Prepare** – Visualising success helps us avoid defaulting to emotion
- **Values** – When in doubt, lead with your values



# Toolkit



# Intent (shapes impact)

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TOOLKIT

## Your Intent Sets the Tone:

- Feedback should come from a place of support, not frustration or blame
- Your goal is to help the person grow, not to make yourself feel better

## Clear Intent Builds Trust:

- People are more likely to hear and act on feedback if they believe your purpose is to help, not to judge or criticise
- Being clear about why you are giving feedback helps you stay calm, constructive, and focused

## Before you start, ask yourself:

- Am I giving this feedback to help this person improve?
- Am I clear on the difference I want to make by giving this feedback?
- Am I motivated by helping them — or by my own emotions (frustration, anger, disappointment)?

## Key Reminder

If your motivation is about you, pause and reset. If it's about them, you're ready



# Share your feedback – (I) DESC Model

## **Intent**

State your positive intent at the beginning.

Make it clear that your purpose is to support growth, improvement, or success

## **Describe**

Objectively describe the specific situation or behaviour. Focus on facts, not assumptions

## **Express**

Explain the impact the behaviour has had on you, your colleagues, the service user, or the work. (Where relevant, use "I" statements to express how it affected you personally. If giving feedback on behalf of others, stay factual and professional.)

## **Specify**

Clearly state what you would like the person to do differently in the future

## **Consequences (commitment)**

Explain the positive outcomes if change happens — or the risks if it doesn't — for the individual, the team, the service user, or the organisation

# (I) DESC Constructive feedback example

**Intent:** "I want to have a quick chat about something that I think could really help strengthen team discussions and make sure everyone's voice is heard."

**Describe:** "In the last three project meetings, I've noticed a few moments where you responded to colleagues before they had fully finished sharing their points — for example, during Monday's meeting when Sarah was explaining the client feedback, and again during yesterday's planning session with Tom."

**Express:** "When this happened, Sarah wasn't able to fully explain the client's concerns, and Tom's idea for improving our workflow didn't get fully explored. It also meant that both Sarah and Tom looked a little deflated and hesitant to continue — which can leave colleagues feeling undervalued or less confident about contributing their ideas in future."

**Specify:** "What I'd like you to focus on is pausing after someone speaks — even just a few seconds — to make sure they've finished before you jump in. Maybe also taking a quick note if you have a point you want to come back to."

**Consequences:** "If you can give people that extra space, it will help everyone feel more respected and valued, and it will make our discussions stronger, with more ideas and better teamwork."

# (I) DESC Positive feedback example

**Intent:** "I want to recognise the leadership you've been showing recently and encourage you to keep building on it."

**Describe:** "Over the past month, I've noticed you've been consistently stepping in to open team huddles clearly, setting a focused agenda, and summarising action points at the end of discussions."

**Express:** "This has had a really positive impact — meetings are more efficient, the team stays clear on priorities, and actions are being followed up more quickly. I've also noticed that people like Sarah and James seem more confident speaking up because they know the meetings are structured and respectful of everyone's time. It's created a calmer, more energised atmosphere where people feel heard and valued."

**Specify:** "I'd love you to continue taking that lead role in huddles — opening discussions clearly, keeping the focus, and summarising next steps — because it's really helping the team stay energised, connected, and moving in the right direction together."

**Consequences:** "If you keep this up, it'll strengthen your leadership skills even further and help the whole team work more effectively, confidently, and with a stronger sense of shared purpose."

# Listen to their perspective

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- **Invite their perspective** on what you've just shared
- **Give space to respond**—they may need time to process, and that's okay
- **Acknowledge their feelings**—avoid assuming or jumping to conclusions
- **Be mindful of your own filters**—try to hear their view with fresh ears
- **Remember: understanding doesn't mean agreeing**—both perspectives can be valid
- **Use open-ended questions** to keep the dialogue going
- **Pause if needed**—sometimes a short break helps everyone reset

# Agree on next steps



TOOLKIT

- **Explore options together:**
  - Keep it collaborative and realistic
- **Define ownership:**
  - Make sure both people know their role and feel supported
- **Agree on check-ins:**
  - When and how will you both follow up?
- **Clarify follow-up actions:**
  - Who is doing what? Be specific
- **Use a coaching approach:**
  - Ask, don't tell. Invite reflection and ownership
- **Keep the momentum:**
  - Follow up. Show that change matters
- **\*\*\* Where appropriate discuss any consequences:**
  - What happens if things improve—or don't?





# What to remember: making feedback count

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- **Feedback is a gift** – When done well, it builds trust, clarity, and growth
- **Intent matters** – Ask yourself: "Am I helping this person improve?"
- **Be specific** – Praise is nice, but actionable feedback is powerful
- **Watch your Chimp** – Pause, breathe, and choose how you respond
- **Reflect, don't avoid** – The conversation you're avoiding might be the one that makes the biggest difference
- **Model the culture you want** – If you're a leader, your behaviour sets the tone
- **Prepare, don't script** – Know your outcome, stay open to theirs

The right conversations, at the right time, create the trust and clarity teams need to thrive.