

Supporting Students

Supporting students when the placement is challenging.



FUTURE ALLIES

Developing tomorrow's NDIS Allied Health professionals

Supporting Students

Difficult situations and challenges

Despite the best planning and preparation, placement educators are often faced with difficult situations to work through with their students. However these challenges can provide the best opportunities for learning for both the supervisor and student.

Challenges may be defined as any behaviour, clinical performance or health status that is impacting on a student's ability to meet the requirements of the placement, profession or workplace code of conduct

(Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2010).



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Difficult situations and challenges

Examples of behaviour that an educator may observe that demonstrate a student is experiencing difficulty include:

- Emotional problems including high anxiety or stress.
- Difficulty linking theory to practice.
- Difficulty with clinical reasoning or clinical activity
- Challenging behaviours (i.e. dominating, shy/quiet, disengaged, disruptive etc).
- Lack of interest in clinical area of placement.
- Poor communication skills (with staff or NDIS participants and their supporters).



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Difficult situations and challenges

Further examples of student behaviours that demonstrate a student is experiencing difficulty:

- Poor organisational, prioritisation and administrative skills.
- Lack of self-direction.
- Conflict with clinical educator.
- Overconfidence.

(Australian Learning & Teaching Council, 2010; Health Education and Training Institute, 2012; Queensland Occupational Therapy Fieldwork Collaborative, 2007)



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Difficult situations and challenges

Any concerning behaviour should be addressed as soon as possible to prevent a crisis. This may occur if there is a risk to participant safety or the wellbeing of the student or other staff members. The educator should be aware that difficulties can arise due to many factors including:

- Personal stress including stress relating to other commitments (work, family, university deadlines) .
- Cultural conflict. Students may be confronted by the needs of NDIS participants.
- Culture shock.
- Lack of confidence.



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Difficult situations and challenges

Further examples of factors that may cause difficulties:

- Unclear expectations.
- Inadequate feedback regarding performance in previous placements.
- Limited clinical experience.
- Negative experience in a previous clinical placement.
- Readiness for learning.

(Queensland Occupational Therapy Fieldwork Collaborative, 2007).



Supporting Students

Educator strategies

Student difficulties, if handled well, can be some of the most valuable learning experiences. While difficulties can be experienced on both sides of the support relationship, this resource focuses strategies for educators to support students that face difficulties.

Whenever a student's performance, behaviour or health is affecting their ability to meet the placement learning objectives and competencies required of them, it is important to address the concerns as soon as they become obvious.



Supporting Students

Educator Strategies

1. Identify and explore the problem as early as possible

Although alerting a student to problems will most likely increase their anxiety about the possibility of failing their placement, it is essential that problems be identified throughout the course of a placement so that there are no surprises for a student at the end of the placement. Contact university staff to alert them to the problem.

Educators should also make use of the student assessment resources and competency information provided by professional and regulatory bodies to support identify problems and exploring solutions.



Supporting Students

Educator Strategies

2. Provide timely and factual feedback

Clear, timely, factual and constructive feedback is critical when a student is experiencing difficulties. Be aware that in these circumstances, students can easily interpret all feedback as negative. Label all of your feedback 'feedback', whether it is written or spoken. Use the goals the University and the student have developed to support the conversation.



Supporting Students

Educator Strategies

3. Be supportive

Engage in active listening;

Encourage the student to seek counselling and support as needed (an educator should not provide personal counselling for a student).

Students who are experiencing difficulties often seek support and advice from other people in the organisation rather than the educator. It is useful to take some time to consider how you would feel and respond in the event of this happening. What impact (if any) might this have on your organisation? Could you continue to support a student under these circumstances?



Supporting Students

Educator Strategies

4. Develop a strategy

Review and establish new opportunities for the student to practice inadequately developed skills/competencies and try to keep strategies and outcome measures concrete. This could involve setting new / different goals for the student's placement. You should always do this in conjunction with the University, who may have additional relevant strategies.

Modify your approach. Consider the student's preferred learning style.

Modify the planned learning experiences to promote confidence and increased competence.

Monitor student's implementation of the strategy and designate a review and evaluation date.



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Educator Strategies

5. Maintain confidentiality

Students' progress and performance should only be discussed with the necessary people in the provider organisation and the university.



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Educator Strategies

6. Document the process

Include all important observations, discussions and decisions.

Encourage the student to take notes in all meetings and forward these to you. This allows you to check the student has understood the strategies discussed.

Encourage the student to reflect regularly on their learning and to share these reflections with you



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Educator Strategies

7. Seek support

Inform the university of the problem. They should offer active assistance, mediation and support and negotiate with you to visit or phone the student to provide additional assistance. .

You should immediately contact the university if:

- students report bullying or harassment of any sort.
- students are involved in an incident, are injured or become ill



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Educator Strategies

8. Review and evaluate outcomes

Ensure dates for both review and final evaluation are agreed with the student and university.

Allow a student the opportunity to demonstrate change in performance.

Seek feedback from other staff regarding performance.

Provide feedback when change or no change in performance is noted.



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Educator Strategies

8. Review and evaluate outcomes

Review and/or modify strategy and implement strategy; and

Evaluate performance using the required student assessment tool

Discuss the outcome with the student and university

Developed from (Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2010).



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Significant difficulties

Most difficulties encountered by educators that can be defined as unsatisfactory can be managed. However, you should immediately contact the university if a student is demonstrating unprofessional conduct, professional misconduct or notifiable conduct.

You may also be required to notify the professions' regulatory agency, e.g. Allied Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, as appropriate. Educators should become familiar with relevant university placement manuals and discipline specific requirements for reporting the behaviour.

(Health Workforce Australia, 2013)



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Significant difficulties

Despite the best planning and preparation, placement supervisors can be faced with difficult situations to work through with their students.

However these challenges can provide the best opportunities for learning for both the supervisor and student.



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Reference List

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