

Clarifying Expectations



There is often a lack of clarity regarding workplace expectations. As a result, people working in the same organization, department or team may have different understandings of the expectations related to their jobs. This exercise aims to clarify expectations. To begin, think about a work-related expectation about which you are genuinely curious. Perhaps you wonder if you understand the expectation accurately. Perhaps you wonder how others fulfill the expectation. Do not use this as an opportunity to shame people who are not living up to your expectation of them. Use this as an opportunity to learn from your co-workers and supervisors, if they are in the room. Once you have identified an expectation, frame it as a question. For instance, perhaps you wonder how much time to spend with clients during appointments. As a question, you would ask *“How much time do you spend (or expect me to spend) with clients during appointments?”* Use a process that allows everyone in the group to ask one question. As each person asks a question, the rest of the group answers on a piece of paper or 3 x 5 notecard that is then folded up and collected. One by one, address each question by unveiling the answers provided by the rest of the group. Discuss those questions that yield surprising answers or a diversity of opinions. For example:

Perhaps a relatively new provider asks the question about how long to spend with clients during appointments. Responses may be as follows:



Provider 1: *“I schedule appointments for 20 minutes, so each client gets their 20 minutes. This keeps me on schedule.”*

Provider 2: *“I spend a range of time (x minutes - y minutes), depending on the client and the issues we have to discuss. Each situation is unique.”*

Administrator: *“When I was seeing clients I thought I’d spend at least 25 minutes, but with experience, I rarely went over 15 because I learned how to focus conversations on the most important details.”*

Other suggestions of expectations staff may value discussing include how much information they include in documentation, how they choose which interventions to use with clients/patients, how they structure their first appointment with clients/patients, and how much self-disclosure they use with clients/patients.

Inviting discussion can open the door to learning something from one’s colleagues and perhaps to increasing understanding and empathy for how people manage the many responsibilities and expectations of their jobs. Having administrators/ supervisors in the room encourages clarification too.

As the facilitator, it may be wise to set a few group guidelines:

1. Urge honesty among participants;
2. Make it apparent that no one need engage in the discussion – their answers may remain anonymous;
3. Let the group know that there are no silly questions – people at different stages of their careers naturally may have different questions.

This activity can be done at the start of multiple meetings by reading just one question and the corresponding answers at each meeting.