Session 50: Hard Conversations: Feedback Without Shame

Duration: 60 minutes • Recovery education group. Ensure all participants are seated and ready

Materials: Appendix B for every participant; workbooks and pens

Learning objectives — by the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Deliver one piece of feedback using the observation–impact–request pattern
- Examine their own thoughts first with a Thought Record (Appendix B) when a conversation feels hot
- Receive feedback in the room without defense or counter-charge for two full minutes

Opening (3 minutes)

Newcomer bridge (60 seconds): This is Phase 5 — Giving Back. The one idea today is that feedback is observation, impact, and one askable request — without shame. You are welcome here without earlier sessions; everything you need for today is in this session. Everybody in recovery needs people who will tell them the truth, and almost nobody knows how to do it without leaving a mark. Today we learn the pattern — what I saw, what it did, what I am asking for — and we practice receiving it steadily, instead of as defendants.

Check-in prompt (8 minutes)

Name, craving 0–10, one word for your week — then: "What is the most useful hard thing anyone has ever said to you in recovery? Who said it, and how did they say it?" Log every craving score on the roster.

Passing is honored — you may pass any question, prompt, or practice without explanation, step out and rejoin, and choose a partner-only option where one is offered.

Teaching (20 minutes)

Feedback fails in two directions: silence that watches a peer walk toward the edge, and shame that pushes them closer to it. The spirit of motivational interviewing — partnership, acceptance, compassion — scales down to a peer pattern anyone can run: a specific observation, the honest impact, one clear request. Before the conversation, the helper does their own work first: a Thought Record (Appendix B, Session 11) on the story they are telling themselves, because feedback delivered from an unexamined story is usually an accusation wearing a lanyard.

- **Observation, not biography** 'You have missed three mornings this week' can be discussed. 'You are getting lazy, like before' cannot — it argues about who they are instead of what happened. Stay on the film, not the review.
- **Impact, owned** 'When the chairs were not set, I felt alone with the room' — an I-statement (Session 21) names a real cost without assigning a motive. Impact persuades; motive-reading provokes.
- **One request, actually askable** End with a single, doable ask and a real question mark: 'Will you take the chairs back tomorrow, and tell me tonight if you cannot?' Then stop talking. Their answer is the conversation.

Sources & Evidence — Facilitator background — do not teach

MI-informed facilitation describes feedback delivered in a spirit of partnership and acceptance, and cognitive therapy of substance abuse treats thoughts as testable claims — the helper examines their own story before acting on it (Miller & Rollnick, 2023; Beck et al., 1993). Key sources for this session: Miller & Rollnick (2023); Beck, Wright, Newman, & Liese (1993); SAMHSA (2019), TIP 35. Evidence strength: Moderate as facilitation practice guidance. Spiritual practice: Confession — correlates with honest, examined self-disclosure; evidence: Moderate (Beck et al., 1993). Full citations: Appendix H. The session's Scripture material is in its optional handout (Appendix I), as theological foundation, quoted from the King James Version.

'Evidence strength' grades the correlated mechanism, not the spiritual practice itself

Pause midway through teaching: ask, "What part of that sounds most like your life right now?" Take two or three answers, connect them to the teaching, and continue. Teach in your own words — the bullets are your map, not a script to read aloud.

Discussion questions (10 minutes)

1. Which part of the pattern is hardest for you — seeing clearly, owning impact, or asking plainly?
2. Tell about feedback you received that was true and still harmful. Which element was missing?
3. What thought about a specific person do you need to put on trial (Appendix B) before your next hard conversation?

Skill practice (12 minutes)

Feedback rounds (in pairs, then reversed): each partner delivers two minutes of real feedback on a low-stakes topic agreed in advance — a house job, a session habit — using the pattern. The receiver's assignment is harder: listen, reflect the request back word for word, and answer only the request. Each partner then rates the delivery: observation clean? impact owned? one ask?

Personal application — homework (5 minutes)

Complete one Thought Record (Appendix B) on the story you are carrying about a person you need to talk with. If the record clears, schedule the conversation this week; if it does not, bring the record to your accountability partner instead. Participants write it in their workbook before leaving. Facilitator: name the homework again at the door as people leave.

Facilitator notes and cautions

Hard conversations about safety, relapse, or rule violations belong to staff. Peer feedback is for the shared life of the house and the work of recovery, delivered privately, never in front of an audience, and never in anger. A conversation that heats up ends with a pause and a staff referral, not a winner.

Closing (2 minutes)

Tell the truth early, small, and clean, and nobody has to tell it big and late. Next session: leading the room itself — facilitation basics for peer leaders.

Fidelity check for this session: objectives named at the start ☐ craving scores logged ☐ skill practice completed in full ☐ homework written down by participants ☐ session note filed today ☐