

Working With Your Advisor

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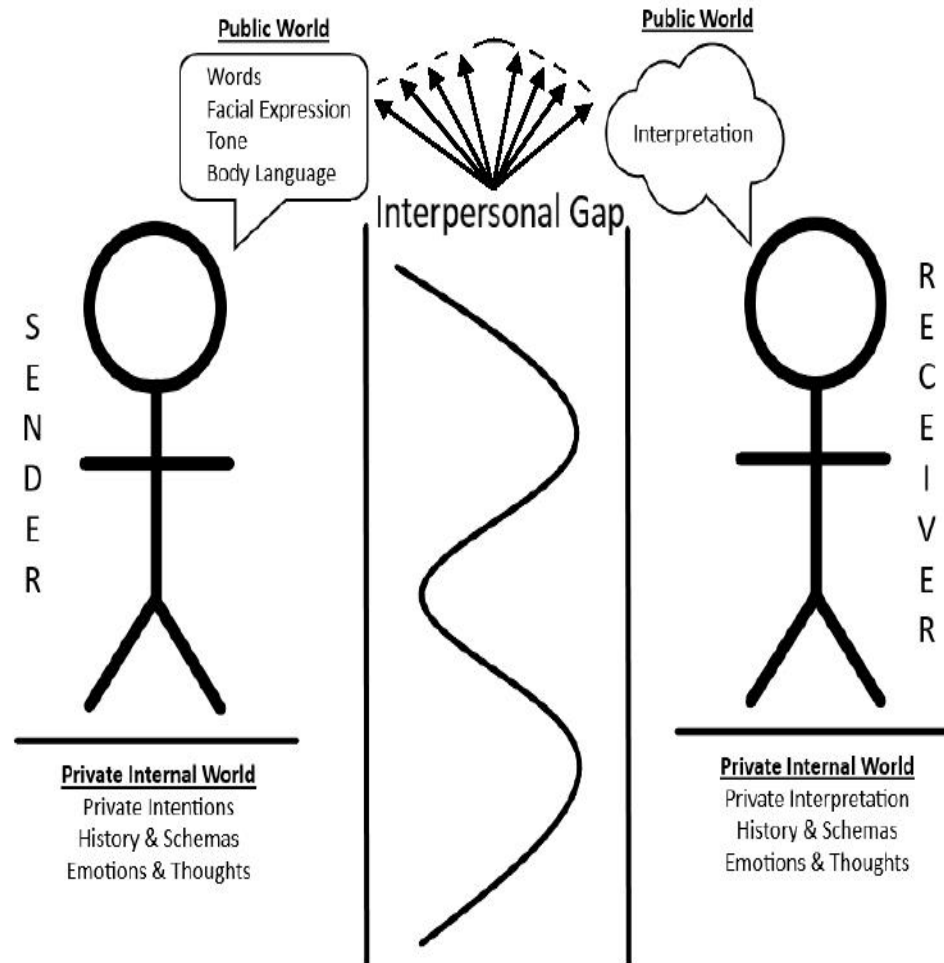


**University
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The Realities of Graduate Student – Advisor Relationships

- The relationship between a graduate student and their advisor is key to the graduate student's development and progress.
- Majority of these relationships are fine although some are poor (i.e., unhelpful, abusive, inappropriate, harassing).
- Many factors influence the relationship between a graduate student and their advisor including:
 - Each person's life experiences (e.g., cultural background, beliefs, values, etc.)
 - Each person's relationship skills
 - Personality styles of each person
 - Virtue Ethics (i.e., your personal ethics)
 - Culture of the environment (e.g., stressors, tolerated behaviour, etc.)
 - Current realities for each person (e.g., are there personal life stressors for one person?)
 - Chaos events –e.g., Covid-19 Pandemic!

Factors Impacting How We Respond



Our Focus Today:

- To talk about how you can foster a good connection with your advisor
- To discuss what you can do when there are stresses in your relationship with your advisor
- To give you strategies and resources should you experience abusive and/or harassing behaviour from your advisor:

**You have the right to an education
without abuse and/or harassment**

Fostering a Good Connection With Your Advisor

- How do you form good connections with anyone?
 - **Be reliable** – you are not valid if you are not reliable (in any relationship!)
 - **Demonstrate interest in the other person and their interests** (e.g., ask about your advisor’s work and department presentations where appropriate and possible – helps you develop your knowledge too!)
 - **Be respectful in language and behaviour** – this can be tough sometimes because of differing life and cultural experiences and teachings
 - **Consider developing a working contract with your advisor outlining expectations for each of you** – frame this as you wanting to make sure you understand what your responsibilities are (but....this will help you understand what your advisor’s responsibilities are too!)
 - **Respond effectively to “connection bids”** (Gottman)

Give Meaningful Attention to The Other Person

Connection Bids (J. Gottman)

- A connection bid is any single expression that is used to try to connect with someone.
- It can be verbal and/or nonverbal; clear or unclear.
- There are three ways that people typically respond to connection bids:
 - “turn towards”
 - “turn away”
 - “turn against”



Connection Bid	Turning-Toward Response	Turning-Away Response	Turning-Against Response
“Can we meet regularly to talk about my thesis?”	“Absolutely. How often would you like to meet?”	“Not right now. What progress have you made on that next experiment?”	“I don’t have time to hold you hand through your degree. You need to grow up and take more responsibility for yourself”
“I’m hungry. Want to get some lunch?”	“I’d love to, thanks.” or “Thanks for asking, but I can’t today.”	“Did you finish that report yet?”	“I never eat with my students. I’m your advisor not your friend.”
“Is it okay if I leave the lab a little early today?”	“No problem at all. You’ve been working really hard and deserve a break”	“Have you seen my glasses?”	“No. You can’t just leave when you want to. You need to be more committed.”
“I’m going to be a little late for the lab meeting.”	“Thank for letting me know. No problem.”	“Do you know the number for tech support?”	“I suppose you expect us to wait for you.”

“Turn-away” Examples in Graduate Studies

- It has been more than a month since you submitted work to your advisor and you still haven't heard anything back.
- Your advisor frequently is away and doesn't let you know when they will be away or for how long. Often, they don't provide a means of contact to allow you to connect with them.
- Your advisor isn't providing as much direction as you would like or need (e.g., frequency of progress meetings, research meetings, etc.).

Managing Stressors with Your Advisor (i.e., responding to “turn-aways”)

- Talk to someone you trust if you’re feeling unhappy, unsupported, etc. You decide who that is:
 - Friend, family-member, colleague;
 - Professional on campus:
 - Student Counselling Centre (SCC) counsellor (204-474-8592);
 - Student Services at the Bannatyne campus (204-272-3190)
 - Office of Student Advocacy (204-474-7423)
 - Office of Human Rights and Conflict Management (204-474-6348)
 - Sexual Violence Resource Centre (204-474-6562)
 - Faculty of Graduate Studies (204-474-9377)
 - Graduate Studies Student Association or Health Sciences Graduate Student Association

Managing Stressors with Your Advisor (i.e., responding to “turn-aways”)

- Don't guess the motives of the other person and consider whether or not you may be misinterpreting what is happening.
 - Can you really “mind-read”?
 - “False Consensus Bias”
 - Consider whether the turn-away was meant as that: are there other possible explanations?
 - If your first assumption is negative, is that the only explanation? Can you come up with two other possibilities?
- That being said, when thinking about what happened, don't minimize. But....don't catastrophize either.

Managing Stressors with Your Advisor (i.e., responding to “turn-aways”)

Imagine you're not feeling supported and then that person is late for an important meeting with you. What are you thinking?

- Neutral interpretation
- Negative interpretation
- Understanding interpretation

Managing Stressors with Your Advisor (i.e., responding to “turn-aways”)

- Try to maintain your composure – especially if you’re having a strong emotional reaction:
 - Consider not responding in the moment;
 - If flooded (i.e., you’re really upset and your heart rate is 100 beats/minute or greater), try to take at least 20 minutes to calm before responding;
 - Think of your favorite colour and try to find 10 things that are that colour around you and name them.
- Try to not “personalize” (i.e., take something as a personal attack when it may not have been meant as that)
 - While walking past your advisor in a busy hallway you say “hello”. Your advisor doesn’t respond. Think of as many reasons as you can why your advisor didn’t respond to you.

Managing Stressors with Your Advisor (i.e., responding to “turn-aways”)

- Use “I” statements to express your concerns and requests:
 - Three parts to “I” messages:
 1. Describe the person’s behaviour in an objective, non-blaming and non-judgmental way.
 2. Describe the feeling the behaviour creates and the effect that the behaviour has
 3. Describe what you would like to be different
 - For example:
 - “It is hard for me to know what to do when our planning meetings are cancelled. I’m getting worried about being able to finish the project and am struggling to get the work done. Is it possible to meet more regularly?”
 - “It is hard for me to participate in the research meetings when you tell me my ideas are stupid. I feel embarrassed and find it difficult to stay there. I would prefer if you could give me feedback without calling my ideas stupid.”

Practicing “I” Statements

1. Describe the person’s behaviour in an objective, non-blaming and non-judgmental way.
2. Describe the feeling the behaviour creates and the effect that the behaviour has
3. Describe what you would like to be different

- It has been more than a month since you submitted work to your advisor and you still haven’t heard anything back.
- Your advisor frequently is away and doesn’t let you know when they will be away or for how long. Often, they don’t provide a means of contact to allow you to connect with them.
- Your advisor isn’t providing as much direction as you would like or need (e.g., frequency of progress meetings, research meetings, etc.).

Managing Stressors with Your Advisor (i.e., responding to “turn-aways”)

- Clarify in writing after meetings to ensure you have full understanding of what was discussed and to have a record of what was discussed. Sending an email can be helpful for this. When doing this, consider expressing appreciation – builds a positive connection. For example:
 - “Thanks for meeting with me and hearing my concerns today. That was really helpful for me. I just want to check to make sure that I have everything right, you said that.....”

Responding to “Turn Against’s”: Harassment and Bullying

- “Bullying is defined as unwelcome, intrusive behavior that takes place within the context of a relationship characterized by a power differential, in which the actions of one or more individuals is harmful toward another person” (Yamada, Cappadocia, & Pepler, 2014)
- Incident rates of bullying vary by study and are as high as 55% (Shinsako, Richman, & Rospenda, 2001):
 - Woolston (2019), in a global sample of doctorate students, found that the highest rates of experienced bullying were in North American Schools (24%)
 - Woolston (2019) also found that 57% of graduate students who reported experiencing bullying felt unable to discuss their situation due to fear of personal repercussions.
- Frequency of bullying varies. Yamada et al. (2014) report that of 21.3% of graduate students who reported being bullied, 16% said that bullying occurred at least once a week.
 - May depend on the focus of this research (i.e., just your advisor or others too?)

Responding to “Turn Againsts”: Harassment and Bullying

- Bullying takes different forms. Yamada et al (2014) reported that types of bullying included:
 - **Threatening-dismissive type** (e.g., undermine work efforts, threats, belittling, etc.)
 - **Passive-aggressive interpersonal type** (e.g., persistent teasing, attempts to humiliate in front of others, inappropriate jokes, racism, prejudiced behaviour, etc.)
 - **Work-management type** (setting impossible deadlines, undue pressure to produce work, shifting “goalposts” without communication, micro-management, etc.)

Responding to “Turn Againsts”: Harassment and Bullying

- **Don't isolate yourself!!** This is often what bullies are trying to do. Talk to someone you trust.
- Recognize what is going on and remember that it has nothing to do with you but everything to do with the other person.
- Name what is going on and legitimize yourself and your thoughts and feelings. Do not engage in self-blame or take responsibility – this is often what the other person wants.
- Document everything that is happening and keep digital records if you can.
- Stop “wishing” for things to be different! You will likely have to take action to make a positive change.

Know Your Rights and Responsibilities

- You have a right to timely feedback from your advisor
- You have a right to education without harassment – do not give the “benefit of the doubt” too easily.
 - Unwanted physical contact
 - Being screamed and sworn at
 - Sexual harassment
 - Bullying behaviour
- Some of your responsibilities:
 - To motivate and guide yourself through your education but to ask for help when needed
 - To take action on your difficulties as they happen
 - Develop positive happenstance about yourself in your program
 - Take advantage of opportunities as they arise
 - Build positive relationships with others (e.g., show interest in the work and activities of others)
 - Be reliable and dedicated
 - Attend departmental events when you can

Finding Help on Campus

- **Policies and Documents:**

- FGS Academic Guide
- Department Supplemental Regulations
- Respectful Work and Learning Environment Policy
- Advisor Student Guidelines
- Responsibilities of Academic Staff with Regard to Students
- Sexual Assault Policy

- **Services for Students:**

- Student Advocacy
- Student Counselling Centre
- Human Rights and Conflict Management
- Sexual Violence Resource Centre
- Academic Learning Centre
- UMGSA and HSGSA
- University Health Services
- The Faculty of Graduate Studies
- Health and Wellness
- Spiritual Care Coordinator

Student Counselling Centre

- Free counselling for students only – [confidential](#)
- Groups, workshops, outreach programs, and one-on-one counselling. Check our website for more information.
- Counselling available for personal and career concerns.
- [We are offering in-person and remote services – you can choose.](#)
- Eligible students can call our reception at [204-474-8592](tel:204-474-8592) to request an initial intake counselling session (required first step before being assigned a counsellor). We are open 8:30 am to 4:30 pm weekdays.

SCC Fall Workshops 2023 (in-person and virtual)

- Stress and Wellness 101
- Grad Steps Wellness Series – only for graduate students!
- Learning to Cope: Workshops series focusing on procrastination, low self-esteem, sleep difficulties, perfectionism
- The Imposter Phenomenon
- Relationships: Coping with the loss of a romantic relationship
- Mid-day mindfulness meditation
- Communication and Conflict: skills to build positive relationships and improve interactions with others
- It's over but it's not: understanding and managing the ongoing impact of trauma
- Self-Compassion
- Luck isn't everything: Creating your own career opportunities

Pre-registration is required for most of our programs

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