



*A Professional Growth Module:*

# **BEING A PRECEPTOR**

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Developing Top-Notch CNAs, One Inservice at a Time

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## A Professional Growth Module: Being a Preceptor

### PUT ON YOUR PRECEPTOR HAT!

As a nursing assistant, you wear many hats throughout the day. You have an assortment of abilities and responsibilities!

But, you were chosen to be a preceptor because of your **knowledge, skills, and values** as a professional nursing assistant.

You've mastered your job as a CNA, and now it's time to try on a new hat . . . the preceptor hat!

**Congratulations!** You've earned the chance to:

- Keep on learning. (*It's impossible to teach without learning!*)
- Share your knowledge with others.
- Gain satisfaction from helping new employees succeed on the job.

But, keep in mind . . . being good at your job is just the first step toward becoming a great preceptor. There's a lot more to learn!

And, as with any new responsibility, there are certain expectations, rules, and regulations.

This inservice will help you become an effective and inspiring preceptor. You'll learn how to communicate and motivate someone. And, you'll get tons of teaching tips and practical advice on structuring your preceptorship time.

But, there are a few things you'll have to bring with you . . . things that can't be taught.

As a preceptor, you must have:

- **Courage**
- **Confidence**
- **Energy**
- **Patience**

In addition, you must commit to following the policies and procedures of your workplace 100% of the time.

It's a big job, and a very important one.

Preceptors have a powerful effect on new employees and on the quality of client care.

**So, get ready! Put on your preceptor hat and dive into this exciting and rewarding opportunity!**



## WHAT IS A PRECEPTOR?

The dictionary defines a **preceptor** as “an expert or a specialist who gives practical experience and training to a student (or new hire), especially in medicine or nursing.”

- A **CNA Preceptor** is an experienced nursing assistant who serves as a role model and a “buddy” to a new employee during orientation.

The term preceptor has been used since the 15th century. But, it didn't become a popular approach to training new employees in the healthcare industry until the 1970s.

A **preceptorship** is the pre-determined period of time, during which a more experienced professional (the preceptor) provides training, guidance, observation, and feedback for the less experienced trainee.

The preceptorship is a **one-to-one relationship** that provides learners with real world experiences to help **bridge the gap between what they have learned in the past and what they need to know now!**



## THE QUALITIES OF A GREAT PRECEPTOR

### GREAT PRECEPTORS ARE:

- **Organized**—You get your work done in a timely and efficient manner.
- **Observant**—You see “the big picture” and recognize when others need support or help.
- **Fair**—You treat others the way you would like to be treated.
- **Flexible**—You get along with all different kinds of people under any circumstance.
- **Open-minded**—You are willing to listen to what others have to say.
- **Patient**—You never tire of answering questions—even if you feel you've already answered it several times!
- **Skilled**—You know your job and can show others the best and safest way to do things.
- **Calm**—You easily handle stressful situations.
- **Enthusiastic**—You love your job and want to share that feeling with others.

### PRECEPTORS ALSO NEED TO BE:

- Good teachers.
  - Creative problem solvers.
  - High energy.
  - Considerate of others.
  - Team players.



### AND, PRECEPTORS SHOULD:

- Be able to perform their regular duties—in addition to their preceptor duties.
- Have a record of above average performance evaluations.
- Have an excellent attendance record.
- Have completed all inservice education requirements every year.
- Keep up-to-date on any changes in workplace policies and procedures.

# WHAT'S NEW?

Grab your favorite highlighter! As you read through this inservice, **highlight five things** you learn that you didn't know before. Share this new information with your supervisor and co-workers!



# COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR PRECEPTORS

There are three main styles of communication: *passive*, *aggressive*, and *assertive*. It's a good idea to be aware of your own style, as well as the style of your learner. **Here is a comparison:**

	PASSIVE	ASSERTIVE	AGGRESSIVE
Description	You put everyone's needs first—while ignoring your own.	You stand up for your rights while showing respect for the rights of others.	You stand up for your own rights—but violate the rights of others.
How you view yourself and others	You may think: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am not important.</li> <li>I don't matter.</li> </ul>	You believe: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Everyone is important.</li> <li>We are all equal.</li> </ul>	You tell others: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your feelings are not important.</li> <li>You don't matter.</li> <li>I think I'm superior.</li> </ul>
Verbal habits and styles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apologizes frequently</li> <li>Speaks in a soft or unsure voice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses "I" statements (to take ownership of own actions)</li> <li>Speaks in a firm voice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses "you" statements (for blaming or accusing others)</li> <li>Speaks in a loud voice</li> </ul>
Non-verbal habits and styles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoids eye contact</li> <li>Stooped shoulders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Direct, non-threatening eye contact</li> <li>Relaxed posture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stares with narrowed, accusing eyes</li> <li>Tense posture, clenched fists, points fingers</li> </ul>
Outcomes or results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low self esteem</li> <li>Not respected by others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High self esteem</li> <li>Self respect</li> <li>Respected by others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low self esteem</li> <li>Disrespected by others</li> <li>Feared by others</li> </ul>

Your goal is to be **ASSERTIVE!** It takes some work to be assertive but, it's worth the effort. Here are some ways to work on this skill:

- **PRACTICE:** Practice assertive communication behaviors in non-threatening situations.
- **CONSIDER THE SITUATION:** Be aware of what is going on around you, including the communication styles of others.
- **AVOID HURTING OTHERS:** If you are in doubt about how your communication might be understood, ask yourself: "*Would I feel comfortable if someone were talking to me this way?*"
- **TREAT EVERYONE WITH RESPECT AND DIGNITY:** Treat *everyone*, from the maintenance man to the president of the company, with courtesy and respect.



## BE THE WELCOMING COMMITTEE!

Before meeting a new employee, think about your first day at work.

***What would have made you more comfortable?***

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***What can you do to make sure your trainee has a great first day?***

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## HERE ARE SOME IDEAS!

- Ask for the new employee's home telephone number or mailing address. Make a call or send a note before his or her first day of work.
- Consider sending a card signed by all your co-workers expressing how exciting you are to have a new team member.
- Make a sign or a banner welcoming your new employee. Post it in a highly visible place in your workplace.

## COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR PRECEPTORS, CONTINUED

One of the most important ways you can be a better communicator is to spend more time listening. The benefits are numerous and don't cost you a penny!

- **Listening keeps you out of trouble.** For example, people who don't listen might miss announcements about important meetings.
- **Listening makes you more competent.** The more information you have about your job, the more successfully you'll perform it.
- **Listening increases your power.** Knowledge is power! Careful listening adds to your knowledge.
- **Listening wins respect.** When you listen to others, you show them respect. In turn, this enhances their respect for you.
- **Listening soothes anger in others.** If you listen to an angry person instead of immediately responding with words of your own, the situation may become less explosive.
- **Listening builds self-esteem in others.** When you stop what you are doing to listen to someone else, you are sending the message that nothing else is more important to you at that moment.

### "I'VE NEVER BEEN A GREAT COMMUNICATOR..."



**Break the myth!** If you think good communicators are just born that way, think again!

Communication skills must be **learned!** Learning involves *understanding* the most effective ways to communicate, and *practicing!* Here are some more tips to help you communicate most effectively:

- Remember. . . it's not what you say, it's how you say it!
- Avoid interrupting when someone else is speaking. (One way to break yourself of this habit is to apologize every time you find yourself interrupting someone.)
- When training new employees, communicate **facts** about your clients—**not opinions**. For example, you might think that a client is grumpy and spoiled, but it's not professional to share this opinion with a new employee.
- Documentation is a form of communication. So, be sure you communicate clearly when you write down information about a new employee. Stick with the facts—and remember that what a preceptor writes may become part of the new employee's permanent record.



# TALK about it!

## Open the Discussion

As you set out in your new role as a preceptor, you're likely to have some questions or come upon some situations that require more guidance or training.

If you need guidance or training—**speak up!** Talk to your supervisor or co-workers to find out if any solutions exist. Here are some things you might ask:

- I'm working with a new employee, but I just can't seem to connect with her. Do you have any advice for developing a relationship with a new person in this situation?
- My trainee asked me \_\_\_\_\_ and I didn't have an answer for her. Can you help me locate the information she needs?
- I need to teach my trainee how to \_\_\_\_\_, but I'm not completely comfortable with this skill. Can you help me out?

**"The mediocre teacher tells.  
The good teacher explains.  
The superior teacher  
demonstrates.  
The great teacher inspires."**

~ William Arthur Ward

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR LEARNER

**New employees are considered “adult learners.” Adult learners need a couple of factors in place to learn effectively. They are:**

- **COMFORT:** Adults must be comfortable—both physically and psychologically—before they are able to learn new things. So, if a new employee seems nervous, try to resolve the anxiety first. Concentrate on introducing the new employee to the other staff members or let the employee have some quiet time to read.
- **ENERGY:** Adults must have enough energy to learn new things. If a new employee is ill or under stress, it will affect his or her ability to learn. Try to be sensitive to a new employee’s “body clock.” For example, does this person seem to learn better first thing in the morning or after lunch?
- **MOTIVATION:** Adults must have a reason for learning new information. For new employees, the reason is usually clear: they want to do well at their new job! You can help build on this motivation by making sure they understand what is expected of them.

**As a preceptor, it’s also important to figure out how your learner learns best. There are four main types of learners:**

- **FEELERS:** People who learn best by “*feeling*” like to compare new information to things they learned in the past. They solve problems by relying on their “gut” feelings. A new employee who is a “feeler” would probably learn best by discussing new information with you.
- **WATCHERS:** People who learn best by “*watching*” like to observe others before they try something new themselves. They solve problems by seeing how other people handle the same problem. A new employee who is a “watcher” would probably learn best by watching videos or demonstrations.
- **THINKERS:** People who learn best by “*thinking*” like to study new information. They solve problems by carefully considering all the options. A new employee who is a “thinker” would probably learn best by reading manuals or self-study packets.
- **DOERS:** People who learn best by “*doing*” like to perform new tasks. They solve problems by taking action. A new employee who is a “doer” would probably learn best by performing client care—with you watching to make sure it’s done right.



# THINK about it!

### HOW DO YOU LEARN BEST?

*When you figure out your own learning style, it helps you be more sensitive to the learning needs of others.*

**Read the descriptions on this page and decide if you are a:**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Feeler**      \_\_\_\_\_ **Watcher**  
\_\_\_\_\_ **Thinker**      \_\_\_\_\_ **Doer**

Most people are a *combination* of two or three. And, it changes when the learning environment changes!

**A general rule:** Whenever possible, use *visual aids* to help new employees learn. Studies show that when people have something to look at while they learn:

- It helps them learn up to 200% *more* information.
- They *remember* as much as 40% more of what they learn.
- It takes up to 35% *less* time to teach them.



***“By learning you will teach;***

***By teaching you will understand.”***

~ Latin Proverb

## TEACHING TIPS FOR PRECEPTORS

### WHEN TEACHING A NEW EMPLOYEE, REMEMBER TO:

- **BE PREPARED:** The success of your training depends almost entirely on your preparation! *It's not enough to simply let a new employee "tag along" and watch you do your regular job.*
- **SET CLEAR GOALS:** If a new employee will be observing you during client care, decide ahead of time what you want the new employee to learn. For example, tell the new employee, *"While I'm working with Mr. Smith, pay close attention to how I help him get dressed" or "When we're with Mrs. Jones, watch how I set up her meal for her."*
- **BE EFFICIENT WITH YOUR TRAINING TIME:** Every part of your training should have a purpose. Tell new employees why they need to know something.
- **PRESENT THE BIG PICTURE:** Don't just review a procedure with a new employee . . . explain *why* a procedure has to be done a certain way.
- **REVIEW THE STEPS:** Make sure *you* know all the steps first. Then, go over the steps with the new employee. It may be helpful to some learners to say the steps back to you before attempting to perform a new skill on a client.
- **RESPECT PRIOR KNOWLEDGE:** Don't start from scratch if a new employee has years of experience as a nursing aide.
- **ASK A LOT OF QUESTIONS:** Asking questions is how you find out what the new employee knows and doesn't know. But don't ask questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no." Instead, try questions like: *"How did you measure intake and output at your previous job?" or "How often have you taken vital signs?" or "What are standard precautions?"*

### WHEN TEACHING A NEW SKILL, TRY FOLLOWING THESE STEPS:

- Explain *why* the skill is important. For example, if you want the employee to learn how to use a hydraulic lift, explain that it's used for client care every day at your workplace.
- Demonstrate the skill for the new employee. You'll probably want to perform the skill a couple of times—once without talking, and again, explaining the procedure as you go.
- Let the new employee practice the skill. Be patient and allow time for questions.
- Have the new employee demonstrate the skill—with you watching.



# TIME 2 laugh!

### 36 YEARS OF SILENCE

A determined Monk-in-training went to a monastery where his preceptor told him: *"You can stay here but we have one important rule: all students observe the vow of silence. You will be allowed to speak in 12 years time."*

After practicing for 12 long years in silent meditation, the day came when the student could say **one** thing or ask **one** question. He said: *"The bed is too hard."*

He kept going for another 12 years of hard silent meditation and when he got the opportunity to speak again, he said *"The food is not good."*

Twelve more years of hard work and he got to speak again—after 36 years of silence, he said, *"I quit."*

His Guru quickly answered: *"Good, all you have been doing anyway is complaining!"*



***"Those that know, do.***

***Those that understand, teach."***

~ Aristotle

## AN ACTION PLAN FOR PRECEPTORS

Here are six easy steps you can follow to create a meaningful and productive preceptorship:

- ESTABLISH A TRUSTING RELATIONSHIP:** You can establish a trusting relationship with your trainee much the same way you do with clients.
  - Be genuine and respectful.
  - Describe exactly what you **can** and **will** do in order to help your trainee reach her goals.
  - Keep the relationship focused on the trainee's needs . . . not your own needs.
  - Limit personal information you disclose about yourself.
- ASSESS EXPERIENCE:** Identify what your trainee already knows and what new skills are needed for the particular unit or type of clients the trainee will work with.
  - You'll need to know if this is a new CNA on her first job or an experienced CNA who just hasn't worked with this type of client.
- GOAL SETTING:** Decide together on the goals that can be accomplished within the timeframe of the preceptorship.
  - Your workplace may provide you with a checklist of tasks that need to be covered during the preceptorship. If this is the case, go through the items on the list with your trainee. Discuss the tasks you feel are most important and ask your trainee to highlight those tasks with which she is most uncomfortable or for which she needs further training.
- CREATE LEARNING EXPERIENCES:** Design opportunities for learning experiences. Remember: **It's not enough to simply let a new employee "tag along" and watch you do your regular job.** You must actively create learning opportunities that move your trainee toward reaching the goals you outlined together.
- MOTIVATE AND INSPIRE:** Read page 8 of this inservice for tips on how to motivate and inspire your trainee!
- FEEDBACK/ASSESSMENT:** Give feedback to new employees every day. They need to know how they are doing. However, if what you have to say is negative, try to "sandwich" it between two positive comments. For example, you might say:
 

*"You performed Mr. Brown's bed bath perfectly! While I do have some suggestions about your transfer technique, I'm impressed with how well you got along with Mr. Brown."*



# THE NEXT STEP!

*Apply what you've learned!*

### DO THE GROUNDWORK

Before you begin a preceptorship with a new employee—you'll have to do some background work to help direct your teaching. Here is what you'll need to know:

#### 1. What experience does the new employee have?

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#### 2. What unit/hall or specific patient population will the new employee be assigned?

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*(Why is this important? If the new employee will be working with several diabetic clients, you can make sure she knows the basics about diabetes.)*

#### 3. When is the new employee expected to be independent.

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*(Why is this important? If your supervisor expects the employee to be ready for his own assignment in one week, you can pace the learning accordingly.)*

## UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATION AND INSPIRATION

Great preceptors **motivate** and **inspire** greatness from their students! But, what does it mean to "motivate" or "inspire" someone—and how do you do it?

Motivation and inspiration are difficult concepts to define. In this inservice, the words are used to describe your actions that lead the learner to:

- **Willingly choose a particular behavior.** (Example: You may inspire your learner to choose to be a helpful member of the team.)
- **Initiate desired behaviors without reminding or coaching.** (Example: Through role modeling, you can motivate your learner to be a hard-working, self-starter who can perform duties independently.)
- **Continue to choose particular behaviors once the preceptorship is complete.** (Example: Through inspiration and motivation, your learner will choose to follow the hand hygiene guidelines you've taught, even when you are no longer there to monitor the behavior.)

## SIX WAYS TO INSPIRE LEARNERS

There are **six major factors** (you can influence) that contribute to your learner's motivation. **This is how you inspire!** The six factors are:

1. **ATTITUDE:** Attitudes are learned. They are formed through experiences and observing role models. And since attitudes are *learned*, they can be *changed!* If you have a positive attitude, then your student will have one too!
2. **NEED:** Most people are motivated to work out of need. They need to make money to feed their families, pay for school, etc. But, people are motivated to do *excellent* work for completely different reasons. It's your job to find out what motivates your trainee to **want** to excel! It may be that she takes pride in a job well done, or she wants to get promoted into a supervisor position. Whatever the reason, find it and encourage it!
3. **STIMULATION:** Babies who grow up in orphanages with no stimulation have severe developmental delays. Humans *need* stimulation to thrive. A learning environment that lacks stimulation will leave your trainee feeling bored, tired, and unable to learn. Challenge your trainee to be actively involved and personally responsible for certain duties. Increase the difficulty level or the work load each day to provide a stimulating experience!
4. **EMOTIONS:** All humans are affected by emotions—and negative emotions can interfere with learning. Help your student understand that emotions can be *controlled* but they can't be *turned off*. If your trainee is overcome with anxiety or fear, help her recognize and *control* the emotions. Sometimes, just acknowledging and expressing understanding can make emotions less powerful.
5. **USEFULNESS:** To understand this factor . . . just think about children. Children want to *help* do everything! They're always trying to master some new skill. It's no different with adults. It's just that adults won't follow you around begging for an opportunity to contribute! Give your trainee plenty of opportunities to try and succeed at new tasks. This will provide a sense of usefulness.
6. **REINFORCEMENT/FEEDBACK:** Providing positive reinforcement and feedback for a job well done can be like giving your trainee a little peek of sunshine after a long stretch of rainy days! It provides the energy boost your trainee will need to keep moving along. The reason you give feedback is to encourage a certain behavior to continue. The key to providing positive feedback is to make sure you are being sincere and that the feedback is for a job well done.



## FINAL TIPS FOR PRECEPTORS

- Consider this: If an employee has a negative first day on the job, there is a high risk of losing that employee within the first ninety days of employment.
- Present a *positive* attitude to new employees. Even if you're having a bad day, it's part of your job as a preceptor to keep any negative thoughts to yourself.
- Take a few minutes at the beginning of each day to make sure you are *organized*. It won't make a very good impression on the new employee if you don't seem to know what you are doing!
- When new employees ask you a question, try guiding them to the source of the answer rather than just giving the answer yourself.
- Adult learners often fear failure, so give lots of positive feedback. Also, make sure they have some quick and easy successes during their first few days on the job.
- Be aware of the pace of your training. Are you going too fast or too slow? Watch your new employee for signs that he or she is overwhelmed (or bored)!
- Avoid going longer than two hours without giving a new employee a break. Even if it's just five minutes—or time to go to the bathroom—a break is an important way to keep from "overloading" a new employee.
- It may be difficult for new employees to admit they don't know something. Be aware of this and present new job skills in a *non-threatening* way. And, if a new employee asks you a question you can't answer, don't be afraid to admit that you don't know. You and the new employee can look for the right answer together.
- Make sure you know where all your workplace resources are located. For example, where is your workplace policy and procedure manual kept? Where do employees pick up a fresh supply of gloves? Where can an employee find out about chemical hazards at your workplace? It's important for preceptors to know the answers to questions like these.
- Be careful about giving advice. Many people will stop listening as soon as they hear the words, "Well, my advice is..." or "What I think you should do is...". If you feel that someone is asking for your opinion, how about saying, "Have you ever thought about doing this...?" or "I was able to solve that problem once by doing this...".



# CONNECT It Now!

*Apply what you know*

### MY GREATEST STRENGTHS

After reading this inservice—take a few moments to consider what makes you a great preceptor.

Review the "Qualities of a Great Preceptor" list\* on page 2 of this inservice. **List the top 3 qualities you have that are on that list:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

\* *Research shows that students learn more from preceptors who exhibit the characteristics on page 2. This does NOT mean that all preceptors have to be exactly alike. It just means that good preceptors have similar characteristics.*

**Now, list one area you think you may need to improve as a preceptor:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

**Share your list of strengths and your one area of weakness with your supervisor. Discuss how you can overcome or change your area of weakness and find a way to turn it into a strength.**

