

What Can You do to “Shut Down” Gossip in your Work Environment?

Talk with your coworkers individually or at your next unit meeting. Address the issue and agree to establish a “no-gossip” zone in your department.

If someone makes a negative comment about your preceptee, counter this with a specific positive comment like, “She’s doing a great job with her IV skills.”

Ask for an explanation of the negative or sarcastic comment...pleasantly ask, “What do you mean by...?”

It might be difficult to avoid contributing to gossip at first, but once it becomes a habit, it will not require a great effort.

Set a personal goal for yourself to look at others in a favorable light.

Address people who constantly make fun of or criticize others.

When gossiping is taking place, one’s silence may be interpreted as agreement. Speak up!

Don’t wait, step in to defend the target of gossip immediately.

Address the conversation if necessary...” Our new employee deserves better than this from us.”

Avoid making sarcastic comments.

References:

Tierney, John. (2009, Nov. 3). *Wall Street Journal*.

There is Never a Good Reason to be Unkind

Part of being a preceptor is “protecting” your preceptee. This means protecting them from snarky words, bullying and gossip.

Research demonstrates gossip that occurs in the workplace is predominately negative. Gossip can be very destructive, not only to personal or professional relationships, but also to the entire work environment. Research also has found that when a negative or unkind comment is made about someone who is not present, that the conversation will escalate and continue to become even more negative and nasty unless someone quickly steps in to defend the “target.” And unfortunately, it doesn’t seem to matter whether the comment or information is fact or fiction, it still gets repeated. In addition, sarcastic remarks such as “Imagine that!?” “Really?” or “There’s a surprise,” can be just as destructive as outright gossip.

Unfortunately, preceptees often are the perfect target for the workplace gossip mill. There are dozens of reasons for this phenomenon. The most basic reason may be that they are, quite simply, the “new guy.” They may not have experience, and they may ask many questions, and perhaps make more mistakes simply because they don’t have the background knowledge that their coworkers have. Moreover, some nurses just don’t have the patience and tolerance necessary to assist the preceptor in acclimating a preceptee to their new job.

The relationship between a preceptor and a preceptee is based upon trust. Therefore, if the preceptee becomes prey to gossip, the preceptor must speak up and “protect” the preceptee by addressing the issue with whomever may be initiating and or contributing to the situation. No, this is not always easy to do, but it is the right thing to do. Planning how this situation might be addressed ahead of time will help the preceptor prepare in the event this occurs. Above all, the preceptor must refrain from initiating or participating in the gossip.

Remember, once you speak about someone to someone else, the damage has been done. Words – simple words – have the power to destroy businesses, reputations and friendships. At some point in our lives, we have all probably been the target of malicious gossip.

When we were children, gossip may have been considered to be a “rite of passage” if one happened to be the injured party. Or that gossip is caused by social pressure to agree with one’s peers and is a necessary sociological experience. None of these make gossiping acceptable...So, what is our excuse now?