

Tips To 'Shut Down' Gossip In Your Work Environment

- Talk with your co-workers. Establish a "No-Gossip" zone in your department.
- If someone makes a negative comment about your preceptee, counter with a specific positive comment, such as "She's doing a great job with her IV skills."
- Ask the person to explain the negative or sarcastic comment. Pleasantly ask "What do you mean?"
- Avoid contributing to gossip. It may be difficult at first, but once it becomes a habit, it will not require a great effort.
- Train yourself to look at others in a favorable light.
- Avoid people who constantly make fun of or criticize others.
- Speak up! When gossip occurs, one's silence may be interpreted as agreement.
- Step in to defend the target of gossip immediately.
- Avoid making sarcastic comments.
- Redirect the conversation if necessary. Example: "Don't we need to take care of our patients?"

References:

Tierney, John. *The Wall Street Journal*. Nov. 3, 2009.

Just Say 'NO' To Gossip!

The Talmud, a collection of ancient rabbinic writings, asks, "Why is gossip like a three-pronged tongue? Because it hurts three people: The person who says it, the person who listens to it and the person about whom it is said."

Researchers who study workplace gossip confirm that it is predominately negative. Gossip can be destructive to personal or professional relationships, as well as the entire work environment. When a negative or unkind comment is made about someone who is not present, the conversation will continue to become more negative and nasty unless someone quickly steps in to defend the "target." Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to matter if the comment or information is true or not because it still gets repeated. In addition, sarcastic remarks such as "Imagine that!" or "There's a surprise!" can be as destructive as outright gossip.

Too often, preceptees are the perfect target for the workplace gossip mill. Although there are dozens of reasons for this phenomenon, the most basic reason is that they are, quite simply, the "new guy." They may ask many questions and make more mistakes simply because they don't have the background knowledge as their experienced co-workers. Moreover, some nurses do not have the patience and tolerance necessary to assist the preceptor in acclimating preceptees to their new job.

The relationship between a preceptor and a preceptee is based on trust. If the preceptee becomes prey to gossip, the preceptor must speak up and protect the preceptee by addressing the issue with the person who initiated or contributed to the situation. This is not always easy to do, but it is the right thing to do. The preceptor can think through how to address this type of situation before it 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 the work environment, reputations and friendships. At some point in our lives, we have all probably been the target of malicious gossip.

Gossip is not a rite of passage. The social pressure to gossip is avoidable. If your preceptee is a new graduate, talk about the effect of gossip on the workplace and discuss ways to create a more positive workplace environment.