

WHAT IS NURSE-TO-NURSE HOSTILITY?

It's the persistent downgrading experienced from your peer(s) that eventually undermines your confidence and self esteem. It's a serious problem in nursing due to increased tasks and job pressures, decreased time together and a history of powerlessness – ***but the biggest problem is that the damage from these behaviors is invisible***. Nurse-to-nurse hostility prevents us from coming together to face our current challenges and threatens our profession on every level.

- OVERT:** *Name calling, bickering, fault-finding, back-stabbing, criticism, intimidation, gossip, blaming, raised eyebrows, shouting, using put-downs, etc.*
- COVERT:** *Unfair assignments, sarcasm, eye-rolling, ignoring, refusing to help, sighing, whining, refusing to work with someone, isolation, sabotage, exclusion*

EFFECTS: Feelings of decreased self esteem, anxiety, fear, guilt, and anger, vulnerability, loss of confidence, humiliation, stress related illnesses, a profound sense of isolation and impaired ability to perform cognitive tasks.

SOLUTIONS

At an individual level:

- Confront the aggressor. Check out any situation that causes you worry by *directly speaking to the aggressor in private*. Begin with the details; then share the impact.
- Never be a silent witness: never stand by and listen as one co-worker slams or talks negatively about another co-worker. Role model collegiality at all times.
- If it continues: keep a log of incidents, ask for help from your manager or human resources, make a formal written complaint and as a last resort, take legal action.

At a unit level:

- Adopt a unit philosophy that clearly states that these behaviors are not acceptable and will not be tolerated. Seek nursing leadership report and report these behaviors.
- Adopt the AACN Standards for a Healthy Work Environment
- Educate staff about hostility (call it what it is). Then seek education classes on assertive communication such as the DESC model or crucial conversations.

At an organizational level:

- Adopt a zero tolerance policy and hold all staff accountable all the time. *NO Exceptions!*
- Take complaints seriously and follow up in a timely manner.
- Create a system for reporting, monitoring and feedback.
- Embrace transformational leadership: take a stand, inspire and have a positive vision.

IN THE END, we all want the same thing: to come to work and be recognized, valued, and appreciated for the talents and skills that we alone bring to our team; to enjoy our work and take care of our patients with skill and care, and feel confident and proud to be a NURSE!

TEN TIPS FOR CREATING A HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT

1. Compliment a co-worker every day. Be specific. Point out the skill or art.
e.g. "You did a great job de-escalating Mr. Jones's anger"
2. Never be a "silent witness". Never stand by and listen while a coworker is gossiping, criticizing or talking badly about a peer.
3. Be a team player. If you see someone in need of help, offer assistance. The greatest patient safety net cast to catch mistakes is only as strong as your relationships.
4. Speak your truth – always say what's on your mind. Start the conversation by sharing your perception of what happened. Ask for what you need.
5. Ask someone you don't know very well to share a meal.
6. Never insist on only working with certain nurses – every time you do, you are rejecting other nurses. Exclusion hurts.
7. Always stay patient focused. When in doubt, ask, *"If this patient was my mother, father, baby, what would I do?"*
8. Address issues head-on. Take classes in conflict management and increase your confrontation skills. Ask your manager to help role model difficult conversations with you.
9. Recognize non-verbal innuendos and forms of communicating are damaging. Say what you see; call these non-verbal messages out into the open.
10. Hold yourself accountable. Professionals ask for peer feedback.
Ask: "What is it that I do well?" and "What would you like to see more of?"

DESC MODEL

- ➔ **Describe** the behavior (*Facts first*)
- ➔ **Explain** the impact of the behavior (*Story second*)
Pause, Pause, Pause
- ➔ **State** the desired outcome (*Check for understanding*)
- ➔ **Consequences** will help get your peer's attention

OR

End with a question

D: When...

E: I feel...

S: Therefore, I want

C: So that...

Would you be willing to do that?