

Addressing **Gossip, Whining, Conflict** and **Negative Attitudes**



Why is addressing the workplace environment important?

People leave their jobs most often because of conflicts, negativity, whining and gossip that interferes with their job satisfaction. People need to feel valued. A workplace that values diversity and manages change with respectful conversations will have less negativity to address.

Gossip

Gossip is conversation about someone who isn't present, typically involving details that are not confirmed as being true, that can result in harming that person's reputation. *Listening to gossip is gossiping.*

How can I stop gossip, negativity and backstabbing?

- Resolve to avoid gossip.
- Let others know you will not be part of the negativity.
- Lead the effort to build a positive work environment.

Steps to Stop Gossiping

- Interrupt the gossip and say, *"You sound like you have an issue with this person. Let's go talk to her/him right now."*
- If the gossip refuses to do that, ask: *"Then how about if we sit here and problem solve? I can coach you."*
- If the gossiping continues, say:
 - *"I'm just focusing on my job and I don't want to be part of the gossiping."*
 - *"We signed an agreement not to gossip and I just don't feel good about this conversation."*
 - *"You know, our mission statement includes respect and I'm not comfortable talking about someone who is not present."*
 - *"What you just said is inappropriate. Please think about what you say before you speak."*

Whining

Whining, like gossip, brings people down. When we are around others who whine, we soak up the others' feelings and may start whining, too.

Don't

- Agree with a whiner (you'll get pulled into his/her drama)
- Disagree with a whiner (you never will win the argument)
- Try to fix the issue (the whiner will keep coming back)

Do

- Interrupt the whining and ask, *"Can you give me a concrete example of that?"*
- If he/she provides an example, say, *"Let's sit down and see if we can come up with some solutions."*
- If the whining continues, say, *"Please stop, and don't bring that problem to me again because I can't help you with it."*
- Be blunt. Say, *"Stop. That's not appropriate here."*

Other Approaches

Think about what motivates the whiner and ask him/her to take the lead in solving the problem. For example:

- Ask the person to teach others how to address the problem instead of whining about it.
- Ask the person to lead a team discussion to brainstorm ideas for solving the problem.

Conflict

Conflicting ideas and practices can often produce positive outcomes. But when they are out of balance, we need to confront the issues and people involved. "Confront" means to work out difficulties face to face. It does not mean becoming aggressive or overpowering.

How to Deal with Conflict

- Ask yourself: What's going on? Why do I feel tension?
- Go directly to a source of information about the issue. Ask the person to help you understand why something is happening, what is really going on, how you can make some changes.
- Ask others if you don't seem to find the answers you need. Most issues can be resolved, or at least better understood, if you learn the facts behind decisions.
- If you disagree with the information you receive and find yourself upset, write down the issue and why you are upset.
- Consider your choices to adjust the situation at work so your clientele are not negatively impacted. If you are in total disagreement with a person, you need to ask yourself whether you are able to continue to address the situation or need to seek additional support.
- If you have considered all the options or the mission of the organization is no longer working for you, this may be the time to explore another organization with a mission that better fits you and your values.

This summary is based on the video "Addressing Gossip and Negativity in the Workplace;" Holly Elissa Bruno, Voices DVD, www.ChildCareExchange.com, and adapted for use by NDSU Extension Service, 9-16.