

# Gossip

## EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Resilience  
Empowerment  
Compassion



### What Is Gossip?

Gossip is idle talk or rumor that is discussed without consideration or thought to the potential negative effects upon the person(s) being discussed.

Often the persons gossiping do so without thinking about the negative effect they might have on the person(s) being discussed, a mutual workplace or community. With or without malicious intent, gossip can have a negative impact on individuals, a workplace or community.

### Talking Verses Gossiping

Talking about a person is about understanding and maintaining the other person's wellbeing and integrity. There is no embarrassment about what is being discussed if the person suddenly interrupted the conversation.

### Why Do People Gossip?

There are various reasons why people gossip. Here are a few:

- a need to fit in
- a need to vent
- a need to feel superior
- a need to say they have been wronged
- a need to get support, or rally spectators
- for fun or excitement
- a need to avoid conflict or avoid resolution
- a need to validate your perspective

Participating in gossip as a 'listener' is potentially just as harmful. Gossip may unfairly or unintentionally put the listener(s) in the middle of a situation. Listener(s) may also have their reasons to stay engaged in the conversations, such as:

- wanting to fit in
- wanting to be a trusted member of an "inner circle"
- wanting to validate or confirm closeness
- feeling uncomfortable or unable to deal with the speaker

### Effects of Gossip on an Individual and the Workplace

Whether it is the speaker, the listener or the bystander (those that witness gossip or its effects), gossip negatively impacts all individuals and the entire workplace environment.

Some of the impacts are:

- eroded trust and morale
- increased anxiety in employees
- a climate of tension or fear
- confusion of facts
- clouded perceptions and judgment
- loss of employment
- hurt feelings
- a divisive atmosphere resulting in less opportunity for resolution
- tarnished reputations
- closed office doors
- staff unwilling to speak their minds
- an increase in sick days and stress leave
- a decrease in productivity
- feelings of helplessness and chaos

### Ways to Manage Gossip

If you routinely engage in gossip, try to take into consideration some of the negative impacts mentioned above. Take ownership for the effects of the gossip that you have participated in and strive for more constructive ways to deal with conflict in your life.

Take a stand for a healthy, happy environment. Remember, gossiping can:

- isolate you from others
- isolate others from you
- diminish people's respect for you

Also, should you find yourself in a conversation that is becoming gossip you can choose to do the following:

- excuse yourself from the conversation
- without judgment be clear about your discomfort with the topic
- let others know that you are not interested in gossiping
- suggest the person speak directly with the subject of gossip
- find neutral or interesting topics, other than people, to talk about

### More Options for Managing Gossip

- Request education or training for yourself or your workplace.
- Speak constructively to your supervisor.
- Engage in team building activities at your workplace.
- Educate employees and management on the government's Respectful Workplace Policy.
- Contact your Respectful Workplace advisor, your union or human resources representative.

### We Can Help.

The Employee Assistance Program can:

- assist in identifying gossip
- work through the impacts of workplace gossip
- develop a plan of action for managing gossip
- coach management and staff dealing with gossip issues
- provide education and support
- provide advice concerning available options
- conduct a workplace assessment
- act as third party facilitator or mediator

### Resources

#### Suggested Reading

- The No Gossip Zone: A No-Nonsense Guide to a Healthy, High-Performing Work Environment. Sam Chapman
- People Skills: How to Assert Yourself, Listen to Others, and Resolve Conflicts. Robert Bolton

#### Website

- Manitoba Civil Service Commission: Respectful Workplace Policy [manitoba.ca/csc/policyman/respect.html](http://manitoba.ca/csc/policyman/respect.html)

### Employee Assistance Program

3rd Floor – 55 Donald Street  
Winnipeg, MB R3C 1L8  
Telephone: 204-945-5786  
Toll Free: 1-866-669-4916  
Fax: 204-948-2298  
TTY: 204-948-3401