Solution

What...

One of the Positive Communication Standards that is focused on promoting an organization-wide commitment to **"BAN BLAME."**

Blaming comes in many forms. Two common forms are "managing down" and "we-they" communication.

"MANAGING DOWN" is blaming others for poor or disappointing outcomes – such as blaming other employees or providers or departments, such as:

> *"I'm sorry that your surgery is delayed today. Your surgeon didn't show up at the scheduled time."*

"WE-THEY STATEMENTS" are a way of blaming when we position ourselves in a positive light in contrast to others that we position in the negative. Usually there are extreme statements that include words like always or never, such as:

> *"We always have to work with old equipment. Administration never approves the funds needed."*

Unfortunately, in systems as complex as health care, mistakes, mishaps, and missteps are likely to happen. So, when things do go wrong … we must choose our response carefully.

Ideally, the response will be healthy and constructive -- which can lead to understanding, learning, improvement, and prevention.

Why…

In contrast, blaming others can make matters worse. Relationships and teamwork can be damaged, the work environment can be tense and unpleasant -- and in high-risk organizations, such as healthcare, blaming behaviors can even work against our efforts to provide safe and satisfying care.

Most people are happier and far more productive working in an organization and on a team where people can be open about their mistakes—and everyone can learn from those mistakes – without being the subject of blame.

Banning blame is one of the 12 Positive Communication Standards that support a better – and safer – place for us, our patients, and our visitors

Why should we all work to stop the blame game? Because we likely all do it. Even the most well-intentioned people can find themselves blaming others when things go wrong.

How…

With a heightened sense of awareness – individually and collectively – we can start to notice when we are doing it, and we can stop ourselves and shift into more healthy and constructive responses and conversations about things that go wrong or situations that we wish were different.

Helping ourselves overcome blame. When we all know, understand, and commit to Banning Blame - we can all do our part by monitoring ourselves and taking more responsibility for our own behaviors in support of a civil, respectful, supportive, safe, and encouraging work environment.

When we are more mindful about banning blame, we will start to notice it more when we are doing it ourselves. To help ourselves overcome blame, we can be guided by 3 simple and quick steps:

C - Catch ourselves when we are blaming

A – Apologize for the slip

T - Turn the conversation around from blaming to constructive
      (or, simply stop the conversation)

And when we don't catch ourselves blaming, but others do – and they are caring and helpful (and brave enough!) to call us out on it – our best response is to thank them for pointing it out.

When we appreciate others who remind us of our organization-wide commitment to banning blame, we make giving and receiving feedback a normal, caring part of our daily interactions – and therefore, speaking up and being open to reminders from others can become less uncomfortable and a positive force for change.

> " *Blaming is a lot like running in place, it takes up a lot of energy but you really aren't getting anywhere.* "

Helping others overcome blame. We can also be helpful to others by pointing it out, in a caring and supportive way, when we hear blaming statements being made.

Being patient and understanding of the humanness of others and how they, like us, might slip by making blaming statements from time-to-time – in essence, we don't won't to "blame people for blaming," we simply want to turn their awareness to the fact that it is happening (or perceived to be happening).

While it may seem uncomfortable, it is an act of caring to speak up when others are making blaming statements (e.g., "managing down" or "we-they").

If you aren't sure what to say in response to someone who is blaming, consider the following:

▶ **Ask a question** such as: "In keeping with our commitment to ban blame, is there a way you can talk about this situation or your feelings in a helpful, constructive, and non-blaming, way?"

▶ Or **simply call it out**, to let them know that you noticed: "that sounds like blame" – "that sounds like we-they"

▶ **Create a well-known visual cue** - Some teams, departments, or entire organizations designate a hand signal or some other visual cue to be used as a quick and safe way to call out and turn around or stop blaming conversations. To make this work, everyone needs to know what the signal is (such as tapping your name badge twice or making a peace sign with your fingers), and what it means (to either turn the conversation around from blaming to one that is constructive and helpful, or to simply cease the conversation).

The role of leaders. As in any culture change effort, leaders must be on board with a commitment to banning blame. If blaming is going on in the workforce, you will also observe this behavior in the ranks of leadership.

Leaders often struggle to differentiate between accountability and blame in response to things that don't go as planned or results that are undesirable.

Leaders have a critical role in the creation of a healthy culture of reporting, learning, prevention, and improvement.

While blame should be banned from everyone's behavior, leaders must lead the way. This includes leaders role modeling the tactics included above in "HELPING OURSELVES OVERCOME BLAME" and "HELPING OTHERS OVERCOME BLAME."

As leaders, important advice for banning blame in their work includes:

▶ Do not bash another leader to your employees

▶ Do not bash another department to your employees

▶ Do not blame others for poor or disappointing outcomes

> " *No one wins a game of blame.* "

While simply declaring a ban on blaming communications and conduct is not going to change a culture overnight, it will aid in starting the process of awareness and sensitivity to the ill effects caused by such behavior.