

# Breaking the Silence: Lateral Violence, New Graduate Nurses, and Nursing Culture

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New nursing graduates often face bullying from senior nurses, a phenomenon known as "Nurses Eat Their Young," where they endure mistreatment, criticism, or exclusion (Edmonson & Zelonka, 2019). In fact, 78% of nursing students report bullying in school, half encounter nurse-on-nurse bullying during placements, and 60% of new nurses leave their jobs due to workplace bullying (Edmonson & Zelonka, 2019).

This behaviour must be addressed in undergraduate education, as it negatively impacts work quality, turnover, burnout, patient outcomes (e.g., falls, medication errors, dissatisfaction), and professional confidence (Goh, Hosier & Zhang, 2022). This bullying behavior is often passed down as an intergenerational pattern, with senior nurses perpetuating the cycle, and it is essential that all parties, including educators, senior nurses, and healthcare institutions, work collaboratively to address and eliminate it.

## Instilling Confidence & Resilience in Nursing Students: A Collaborative Approach

By integrating the following principles into our teaching practices, faculty and clinical instructors can create a space where students feel supported, empowered, and confident in their development as future resilient nurses. Each principle is rooted in fostering a strong, trust-based relationship, advocating for students' growth, and providing a safe, supportive environment for learning and development.

*Ethics: Consent was obtained and quotes were provided voluntarily. Anonymity maintained.*

*"On my first day shift as a new orientee on the surgical floor, my preceptor went home sick. Due to short staffing, I was reassigned and given four patients by another nurse. Although she said she'd be available, she was busy with her own load, and I was left feeling unsafe and unsupported. When I brought my concerns to management, they backed me and told me to go home. While I was charting, management spoke to the nurse about the situation. Not realizing I was sitting nearby, she and other nurses spoke abrasively, saying I had enough help and was being dramatic. I started crying at the station, and only then did they realize I was there. It was a discouraging experience and a clear example of nurses eating their young."*  
-2024

*"As a nursing student, I made an oversight in my charting. The primary nurse responded by reprimanding me in front of the entire team at the nursing station."*  
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*"Day after day, I was getting picked on by this one nurse, well at least that was my perception and then finally I said to the seasoned nurse 'what am I doing that is bothering you? What have I done wrong?' They then responded with 'OK you do have a backbone.' And then everything was fine after that. My concern afterwards was what if I didn't say anything? What will happen to the next person who doesn't feel confident enough to address this. I was ready to leave that unit."*  
-2011

*"When I had my first shift ever as a new graduate medical-surgical nurse my preceptor made me take two patients on my first day on a new unit. I had not had a medical-surgical placement in over a year and did not feel competent to start with two patients without being orientated to the unit. Due to the unwelcoming feeling, I took two patients despite not feeling comfortable on my first day. The nurse did not ask if I was doing okay and rarely checked in on my first day. I felt as if I was thrown to the wolves and was put in a sink or swim situation."*  
-2025

### References

