

Humiliation

Humiliation is a powerful negative emotional experience in which a person feels degraded, shamed, or disrespected—usually in front of others. In clinical environments like neurosurgery, humiliation can severely damage morale, learning, and team trust.

Definition

Humiliation involves:

- A perceived loss of dignity or status
- Public exposure of error or inadequacy
- Imbalance of power between the one humiliating and the one humiliated

It goes beyond embarrassment by adding **intentionality**, **publicness**, and **power dynamics**.

Examples in Neurosurgical Context

- A resident being mocked in front of peers for a wrong answer.
- A scrub nurse being yelled at in the OR over a minor mistake.
- A junior surgeon’s complications being presented in M&M rounds with sarcasm or ridicule.

“He was not just corrected—he was humiliated in front of the whole OR team.”

Impact on Team and Training

- Decreased psychological safety
- Suppression of questions and communication
- Emotional [distress](#), [burnout](#), and [disengagement](#)
- Long-term impairment in professional development

Distinguishing Feedback from Humiliation

Constructive Feedback	Humiliation
Focuses on behavior/performance	Attacks person or character
Delivered privately or respectfully	Delivered publicly with ridicule
Intended to teach or improve	Intended to shame or assert dominance
Encourages future learning	Discourages participation and openness

How to Prevent Humiliation in Surgical Education

- Promote a culture of [respectful teaching](#)

- Correct privately when possible
- Use **debriefing**, not **degrading**
- Model humility and vulnerability as a leader
- Train attendings and seniors in **mentorship skills**

Quote

“Teaching through humiliation produces silence, not excellence.”

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