

Telling vs. Tattling

There is a difference between tattling and telling. Telling is sometimes called **reporting**. The charts below will help you to work with your child to understand this difference and increase his/her comfort with telling if he/she sees or hears something that's not quite right.

Telling

- The child telling wants to keep themselves or others safe.
- The child telling is concerned about safety.
- The problem is important and urgent.
- Someone may be hurt or in danger.
- An adult is needed to help solve the problem.

Tattling

- The child tattling wants to get someone else in trouble or avoid blame.
- The child tattling may have something to gain, such as attention or popularity.
- No one is hurt or in danger.
- It is not an important problem and can be solved without an adult.
- The child threatens to tell on another in order to control the other child.

You decide: Telling or tattling?

Try to determine if a child observing these situations should to tell an adult or if they would just be tattling. Make a list of rules to help decide if it is telling or tattling.

- In the back row of class, Billy makes a face at the teacher when her back is turned to the board.
- On the playground, Roger is pulling other kids' hats off and throwing them over the fence.
- In the cafeteria, Sarah does not drink all of her milk and throws it away.
- After school, Sam tells a younger student that he is going to beat him up if he does not give him a candy bar.
- On the bus, Torre is kicking the back of the bus seat that Susie is sitting in and it is annoying.
- At home, Mark lets the dog outside without a leash.
- After school, Mary decides to make macaroni and cheese on the stove even though Mom has told her not to use the stove when she is gone.
- In the neighborhood, Cal decides he can ride his bike in the street when his parents are not home.
- At the restaurant, Billy blows air through the straw into his cup and it foams over.
- On Facebook, Kayla is getting hurtful posts that are calling her names.

- Make up your own situations and decide if it is telling or tattling.

Remember, you tell an adult when you are concerned about safety and someone might get hurt. You tell if it is important and urgent. You tell if you have tried to solve the problem and it has not stopped. You tell if you need an adult to help solve the problem.

How to tell an adult about a problem

- Ask to talk with the adult privately.
- Tell the adult that you are concerned about a problem and need help with how to solve it.
- Tell the adult about the problem and how it is unsafe or dangerous, or if someone is hurt.
- Ask how you can help to make it better.