



Don't Be a Snitchy Witch: Tips to Prevent Snitching



Nobody likes a snitch, but it can be difficult for children to understand the difference between being a tattletale and reporting a dangerous situation to an adult. *Snitchy Witch* by Frank J. Sileo, Ph.D., explores the difference between tattling, or snitching, and telling or reporting. As young children develop their sense of right and wrong, they may struggle with tattling.

This excerpt from Dr. Sileo's "Note to Grown-Up Witches" provides useful strategies for parents to help their children learn the difference between snitching and telling, develop problem-solving skills, and develop empathy.

To Tell or Not to Tell

Snitching, or tattling, is telling on someone when the situation is safe and does not require an adult to be involved. Telling, or reporting, is telling an adult when someone or something is being hurt or is in danger, or when someone is deliberately being destructive or hurtful.

Children tattle for many different reasons including seeking attention, jealousy or wanting to get someone in trouble, to show they know the rules, and others. They may snitch because they haven't yet developed the ability to think abstractly, so they interpret rules very rigidly. Young children also may have not yet developed effective interpersonal problem solving skills, leading them to involve adults unnecessarily.

Of course, there are times when children should always tell an adult that something is going on. Let your child know they can always ask you if they are unsure about a situation. Help your child learn to recognize the difference between dangerous situations, like bullying or someone or getting hurt, and frustrating or upsetting situations, like people being rude or selfish, by providing concrete examples.

Wanda was glad she made the switch from being a snitch!

If Your Child Snitches

Teaching your child the difference between snitching and telling is an important starting point, but remember that children may snitch for a lot of different reasons.

Teach Problem-Solving Skills

Young children are learning the important skills needed to deal with conflict and problems. Stepping in to solve problems too quickly will teach your child that the only way to solve a problem is to go to an adult for help. Instead, teach your child to work through conflicts with others. For example, suggest they take a few deep breaths and think about a way to handle the situation on their own before tattling. Give them tools—like using words (“I don’t like it when you don’t share with me”) or walking away to play with someone or something else in a difficult situation.

Avoid Rewarding Snitching Behavior

Sometimes a child tattles because she is seeking attention, feels jealous, or wants to get another child in trouble. Resist jumping right in and to scold the “perpetrator.” You’ll be giving the “snitcher” a false sense of importance, and likely encourage more snitching. If safety is not an issue, avoid punishing the other child, so that you avoid giving positive attention to the snitcher.

Show and Teach Empathy

Children may snitch because they want you to know that they know the rules. Acknowledge and praise the child for coming to you and knowing and following the rules. Validate their concerns and feelings. You might say, “Thank you for being concerned about your sister’s safety about her jumping on the bed.” At the same time, you can talk about and teach empathy. Ask your child, “How would you feel if someone told on you about something that might be an accident? Would you be angry? Sad? Upset?” Help your child understand that other kids may not want to play with her for fear of being tattled on. As your child develops empathy, she may be less inclined to snitch.

This Article’s Author

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In his practice, Dr. Sileo works with children, adolescents, adults, and families. Since 2010, he has been consistently recognized as one of New Jersey’s top kids’ doctors.

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