

Tattling and Telling are not the same.

Many students hesitate to report significant behavior for fear of being perceived as a “snitch” or “tattletale.” Other students may rely too heavily on adult interventions, impeding their ability to develop appropriate social skills or problem solving strategies. Deciphering between those situations that need adult assistance and those that can be solved independently is a learned skill that initially requires adult guidance and practice to master. Here are some guidelines to help children understand the differences between tattling and telling.

- Tattling is reporting somebody’s behavior to get the other student in trouble and/or to gain attention for yourself.
- Telling is reporting someone’s behavior in order to get help. The purpose is to protect yourself or someone else (safety concern) or to prevent or report property damage. Telling should be used when a child has attempted to address the problem on their own unsuccessfully and now needs assistance from an adult to solve the problem.

TATTLING	TELLING
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The purpose is to get someone in trouble.• The problem can be handled by yourself.• The problem is unimportant.• The behavior of the person may be annoying, but it is harmless.• The person’s behavior is accidental.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The purpose is to keep someone safe.• The problem needs help from an adult to solve.• The behavior of the person is harmful, dangerous, or hurtful.• The person’s behavior is on purpose.

This chart is adapted from the book *Bully Proofing Your School*, by Carla Garrity and others.

The above chart could be a tool that is referenced while addressing common behaviors in the classroom and at home, working through constructed scenarios, or even while discussing children’s literature. (Examples of books related to tattling vs telling: *A Bad Case of Tattle Tongue* by Julia Cook, *The Recess Queen* by Alexis O’Neill, *Don’t Squeal Unless It’s a Big Deal: A Tale of Tattletales* by Jeanie Franz Ransom, and *Help Me Be Good at Tattling* by Joy Berry.)

When the word “bullying” is used by a student, it is helpful to keep in mind the three components of the bullying definition, which include “hurtful actions or words that are repeated, intentional, and involve individuals of unequal power or status.” Redefining the situation for students may be appropriate as there are occasions when behavior (ex: peer conflict) is hurtful, wrong, and warrants attention, but is not necessarily bullying.