

**CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT
STRATEGIES**

**COPING WITH
TATTTLING**

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- Elementary students, especially those in kindergarten through second grade, are quick to tattle. Resolving these student conflicts can make you feel more like a referee than an instructor, with more time spent dealing with disputes than teaching lessons. And if you don't find a way to contain this problem, you may find that you have a tattling epidemic on your hands, with a constant stream of students eager to report on their classmates.
- The dilemma for the teacher is whether to respond to tattletales. While your teaching obligations preclude you from dealing with every dispute that arises, you also want to make sure that no student is being hurt physically or emotionally by a classmate. The following strategies will help you walk this line in a way that allows you to spend most of your time teaching while ensuring that students are safeguarded.

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What You Can Do?

- I. Encourage students to ignore behaviors that do not affect them. When a student complains to you about a classmate's behavior that does not affect him, let him know this is not his concern. You might say "I'm happy to see that you know how to behave, but I would prefer you not tell me about behavior that does not concern you." Some teachers use the phrase M.Y.O.B. to give the message to students to "mind your own business."

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What You Can Do?

2. Teach your students the difference between tattling and telling. Discuss the issue of tattling with your class. Ask students how they feel when someone tattles on them, making sure to elicit the point that students are likely to be upset with classmates who tattle. Tell your class that the only time that they are allowed to report a student's behavior to you is when a classmate is doing something that is hurtful, destructive or dangerous, explaining what you mean by these terms. Inform your students that when they report these incidents to you they are not tattling but rather telling important information. Give your students some situations and ask them to identify whether they are examples of tattling, and thus not allowed, or telling, which is not only allowed but encouraged.

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What You Can Do?

3. Encourage students to settle problems on their own. If a student complains about something a classmate has done to him, encourage him to solve the problem without your help. You might give him some ideas about to respond. If you find that a number of your students have difficulty asserting themselves with their classmates, consider doing some role-playing with them so they can gain the confidence and skills to stop classmates from doing things they do not like.

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What You Can Do?

4. Don't automatically dismiss a student's concern. Be especially attentive to reports suggesting that a student is being bullied, especially if you are getting similar reports from various students. Studies of bullying indicate that teachers sometimes fail to respond to reports of students being taunted, threatened or harassed. If you conclude that bullying is taking place, you will want to intervene rather than encourage the victim to stand up to the bully. In bullying situations, there is often an imbalance of power that makes it difficult for a typically weaker, smaller student to confront a stronger, bigger classmate.

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What You Can Do?

5. Stop a student before he even gets a chance to tattle. If you sense a student is about to tattle on a classmate, stop the student before he completes his thought and say to him: “Are you about to tattle on another student or are you going to tell me important information that a student is doing something that is hurtful or destructive.” If he tells you the latter, let him finish his thought.

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What You Can Do?

6. Set up a situation box. Put a covered shoe box on your desk with a slit in the top. Place a note pad next to the box. Let your students know that if they have a concern about a classmate and need your help in dealing with it, they can write a note and leave it in the box. Tell them that you will read the notes before the end of the day and follow up with the student who wrote the note if you think help is needed. Reassure them that they can still see you without leaving a note to report a student doing something hurtful, dangerous or destructive.

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What You Can Do?

7. Do not put students in charge of their classmates. Putting a student in a position of authority over his classmates will often give rise to the student telling you about students who have been non-compliant, which will engender student conflict. You can give students responsibilities in the classroom; just make sure that being in charge of their classmates is not one of them.

- Adapted from:

Shore, K. (2020, September 17). *Coping with Tattling*. Ken Shore.

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