

Tattling vs. Telling

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There's a huge difference between kids *tattling* on each other and those who *tell* on another. The motivation behind *tattling* is usually to get the other guy in trouble, and the behavior generally involves trivial or meaningless behavior. (Mom...he's looking at me again. Tell him to stop! Or, Dad, she's touching my arm...punish her!). You know what I mean, the dumb stuff that you really don't need to know about.

Telling, however, involves the important things. Teach your children that you need to know if a sibling or a friend is engaging in dangerous, destructive or immoral behavior. *Dangerous* activities range from involvement in online chat groups without the parent's knowledge or permission, riding a bike or scooter on the street or another hazardous area, jumping on furniture that may tip over, or climbing on counters to reach high objects. *Destructive* behavior varies from cutting one's hair (or the dog's coat) with a scissor, playing with matches, to sneaking out at night. Immoral behavior involves lying, stealing, cheating or using drugs or alcohol. Now these activities parents need to know about and your children should be encouraged to share any knowledge of this with you. Guarantee confidentiality if you can so that they will feel free to confide in you.

If you have a chronic tattler, tell the offending child that for every tattle (versus telling you an important piece of information), that they will receive a negative consequence. This can range from loss of a favorite toy for a week or two (or permanent loss of a possession if it's a repeat offender), early bedtime, or loss of TV or other electronics for a specified amount of time. As with all behaviors that need to be changed, be sure that the consequence is of consequence to the individual child and that you stick with it.