

Rethinking Tattling

Editor's Pick. Written by L. R. Knost.

Few things irritate adults as quickly as a tattle-tale. The kneejerk response is often “*Stop tattling!*” or “*Handle it yourself!*” or even to shame (heard of the ‘Get Along Shirt’ where parents force their squabbling children into close bodily contact with one another instead of helping them to communicate and resolve their differences respectfully?) or to punish little tattlers.

But stop for a moment and think: What is being communicated? What is a child actually trying to tell us when they tattle? What message is a child getting by our response?

Tattling is, in effect, a child seeking wise counsel for a situation they don’t know how to handle. When faced with a conflict that just weeks or months earlier would have resulted in tears or snatching or hitting or some combination of all three, a child who has matured and begun to develop some self-control is learning to stop and think instead of just react. But what do they do if no solution presents itself? What if they’ve tried to reason or negotiate with the object of their conflict and been unable to come to a resolution?

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