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This intervention is a set of recommendations that should reduce or eliminate the problems in question in most average children. If problems do not improve and/or if problems are severe, you should seek the personal assistance of a child psychologist, psychiatrist, or pediatrician for further evaluation and treatment.

Interventions for
TATTLING

When tattling among siblings and playmates is over fairly minor annoying behavior and is done simply to seek adult attention, the tattling behavior should be eliminated to promote better ways of coping with conflict. This handout includes remarks about the nature of common tattling and describes a procedure to eliminate tattling.

When there is the potential for a child to be harassed or injured by another child, adult intervention is called for and the procedure discussed here would not be appropriate. If your child is being victimized, a need exists for you to investigate and take action to prevent this from occurring. If your child is victimizing others, help from a qualified mental health professional may be in order.

The Nature of Common Tattling

1. The usual reasons children tattle is to receive attention from an adult and to get even with another child who has made them angry.
2. Each time an adult responds to tattling by investigating, listening to opposing sides argue, and punishing the apparent offender, this increases the chance that the children involved will continue to use tattling to get attention and get the other child in trouble.
3. Tattling and the resulting investigation and punishment do not solve behavior problems. We know this because the tattling-investigation-punishment pattern is repeated over and over.
4. Most children have the ability to cope with annoyances without tattling. They are capable of walking away from other children who are bothering them, but they are often not motivated to do this.
5. A way to stop tattling is to make it unrewarding.

The Procedure

1. Talk to your children about how to handle another child who is bothering them. Discuss things they can do such as walking away, finding something else to do, going in their room and closing their door.
2. Talk to your children about the difference between tattling and informing an adult when someone is engaging in dangerous behavior. Have this discussion with your child when it is not an issue, during a time when there is no conflict. It will not be effective to try to have this conversation with your child when they are amid a conflict situation with another child and trying to get you to intervene.
3. When you are approached by a tattler, simply say “I don’t listen to tattling.” Communicate by your refusal to get involved that you expect the tattler to handle the situation without your help.
4. Do Not: look at the tattler, say anything else to the tattler, go investigate, ask questions, take any action designed to try to figure out who did what, or punish anyone for anything you didn’t see or hear yourself.
5. Be consistent! Respond this way each time you are approached.
6. When you see a child handle a conflict situation with another child by walking away or otherwise handling the situation without becoming aggressive and without tattling, reward them with immediate praise. Show them they can receive the adult attention they desire by behaving appropriately.