



Parenting the Preschooler

Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

How do you react to your child's tattling?

Ages & Stages

PRECHOOLER A child who is 3 to 5 years of age.

YOUNG CHILD A child who is 0 to 8 years of age.

Minding Our Language

Families come in all shapes, sizes, and styles. A “family” may include people who are related by blood, by marriage, and by choice. “Parents” may be biological, step-, foster, adoptive, legally appointed, or something else. When we use the words “family” and “parent” in these materials, we do so inclusively and with great respect for all adults who care for and work with young people.

It is completely normal for preschoolers to tattle. Sometimes children tattle because they want attention and sometimes because they need help. Other times children tattle because they have seen a behavior they know is wrong and they want everyone to know that they are not the one doing it!

Preschoolers are learning about right and wrong and want to be able to tell you about it. By talking to you about the things they see and hear, they learn about what goes on around them and how to behave. How you react to tattling will affect their behavior, so keep the following tips in mind when your child tattles:

- Avoid sending mixed messages. Correct the behavior of the child who has tattled and of the child who has been tattled on separately. If you finish correcting tattler, then immediately correct the other child, both children are likely to become confused about whether tattling is okay.
- Give your child attention when they are behaving well.
- Ignore any tattling you hear unless someone is in danger. (*“I would rather hear a story about you right now.”*)
- Recognize that your child knows right from wrong. (*“I’m glad you know better.”*) Sometimes this is all they need to hear.
- Praise your child’s concern for others. (*“It’s nice of you to worry about your friends.”*)
- Stay out of the situation. Let your child know that you are confident they can work out the problem without your help.
- Ask your child to solve the problem together with the other child (or children) involved, then let you know what they have decided.
- Teach your preschooler how to talk to other children about the way they behave.
- Praise your child when they try to solve their own problems.
- Be patient and kind as they learn new ways of handling themselves.

Find Out More

MSU Extension provides the following resources for parents and caregivers of preschoolers and young children at no or low cost. Be sure to check out these and other MSU Extension resources available at www.extension.msu.edu.

Extension Extras (<https://bit.ly/2LC2vdX>) – These compilations of news articles, activities, parenting tips and advice are published online Monday through Friday. The resources are designed for parents and caregivers of young children who are home all day during the novel coronavirus pandemic. Each day has a theme: Mindful Mondays, Tips on Tuesday, Working Wednesdays, Thinking Thursday, and Fun Fridays.

Extension Extras Enrichment Kits (<https://bit.ly/35QAplQ>) – These kits feature five or six early childhood activities with learning goals focused in areas such as social and emotional health, literacy, and STEM; a supply list; suggested children's books; introduction letters explaining how to use the materials; and an evaluation. The kits are available as free downloads.

Early Childhood Videos (<https://bit.ly/3ioyEkS>) – These short videos offer parents and caregivers of young children information on parenting topics. Titles include "Perspective Taking," "Family Movies," "Goals of Misbehavior," "Using Thinking and Feeling Words," "The Waiting Game," and "When Siblings Fight."

Building Early Emotional Skills (BEES) in Young Children (<https://bit.ly/38XW4Kl>) – This page provides links to a variety of free online parenting courses, workshops, and events offered by MSU Extension for parents and caregivers of young children aged 0 to 3.

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