

Words of WITSdom

WITS Articles for School Newsletters & Websites



The WITS Programs are designed to bring together schools, families and communities to create responsive environments that help children deal with bullying and peer victimization. Ensuring parents are well-informed about the programs and their vital role in reinforcing WITS strategies is an important part of successful implementation. As such the WITS Team has developed **Words of WITSdom**: short articles to communicate key information to parents about WITS and peer victimization, as well as available program resources.

The articles are divided into three categories:

1. WITS FAQ – Provides information and tools that correspond to parents’ most commonly asked questions about the WITS Programs, peer conflict and bullying.
2. Featured WITS Books – Highlights books from the WITS Primary Programs’ book list that parents can read with their Kindergarten to Grade 3 children and suggests questions to explore the books’ themes.
3. Featured LEADS Books – Highlights books from the WITS LEADS Programs’ book list that parents can read with their Grades 4-6 children and suggests questions to explore the books’ themes.

All three categories are designed to be copied and pasted into school newsletters, websites or class blogs as a quick and easy way to keep parents informed about and engaged in the WITS Programs. You are encouraged to use these write-ups in any order, edited as needed, to best communicate with your school community.

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WITS FAQ

1. What are the WITS Programs?

The WITS Programs bring together schools, families and communities to create responsive environments that help children deal with bullying and peer conflict. WITS has two parts:

1. WITS Primary Program – Teaches Kindergarten to Grade 3 children to **W**alk away, **I**gnore, **T**alk it out and **S**eek help when faced with peer conflict. The acronym also provides a common language that children and the adults around them can use to talk about and respond to problems.
2. WITS LEADS Program – A more grown-up program designed for Grades 4-6 students, which teaches more complex problem-solving strategies: **L**ook and listen, **E**xplore points of view, **A**ct, **D**id it work? and **S**eek help. LEADS trains students to become WITS Leaders who can help younger children with their problems.

Teachers reinforce the programs by reading popular children’s books, which emphasize WITS and LEADS messages, to their students. We also encourage students to use their WITS and LEADS skills to deal with problems and hope you will too!

Want to know more? Explore the WITS website at www.witsprogram.ca.

2. Why include community leaders in the WITS Programs?

A distinguishing characteristic of the WITS Programs is their community-based approach to preventing peer victimization. That’s why our school encourages community leaders, such as police officers and other adult role models, to participate in the programs. When children hear the WITS message from members of the broader community, they realize it’s not just a school lesson or a classroom rule; it’s something we all believe in.

Community leaders show their support at the Swearing-In Ceremony, which launches the WITS Primary Program at the beginning of the school year. They guide students in reciting a WITS Oath and distribute WITS badges. Community leaders also take an active role in the WITS LEADS Program by directing the Tug-of-Help. This rope pull skit explores the idea of seeking help when a child faces problems that are difficult to handle alone.

Community leaders also visit classes throughout the year to exchange stories with children about how they used their WITS. These visits have a powerful impact on children because they show that using WITS and LEADS strategies is a lifelong commitment.

Want to know more? Explore the WITs for Community Leaders section of the WITS website at www.witsprogram.ca/community/.

3. How can I help my child use WITS to solve problems?

Your child can likely recite the WITS acronym but may need help putting it in action. Use the tips below with your child to explore how WITS can help with peer conflict problems.

- **Walk away:** Role-play walking away from the situation. Ask: What would happen if you walked away? Would it solve the problem? If not, try another strategy.
- **Ignore:** Discuss ways to ignore, like leaving the situation or withdrawing eye contact. Ask: What would happen if you ignored? Would it solve the problem? If not, try another strategy.
- **Talk it out:** Suggest statements to use to talk it out with the person bothering him or her. Sometimes saying "Stop" is enough. Maybe a joke would help. Ask: What would happen if you talked it out? Would it solve the problem? If not, try another strategy.
- **Seek help:** Suggest other adults your child could ask for help, like a teacher. Ask: What would happen if you asked another adult for help? Would it solve the problem? If not, who else could you seek help from?

Want to know more? Explore the Using WITS with Your Child section of the WITS website at www.witsprogram.ca/families/using-wits-with-your-children/.

4. How can I help my child use LEADS to solve problems?

LEADS is a more grown-up version of WITS, which teaches Grades 4-6 students, known as WITS Leaders, more complex problem-solving strategies to deal with peer conflict. Help your Grade 4-6 child apply these strategies by learning more about them.

- **Look and listen** to get a better understanding of the problem and what others are feeling about it. Make eye contact, have an open posture and be an active listener.
- **Explore points of view.** Think about how others' perspectives might differ from yours and what might be going on in their lives to cause their actions.
- **Act** once you've got a good understanding of the problem and have thought about how your actions might affect the situation.
- **Did it work?** Ask yourself this question after you've acted. Is the problem fixed? If not, try something else.
- **Seek help** when someone could get hurt or you feel like you can't handle the situation on your own. And remember: if at first you don't get the help you need, keep asking others until you do!

Want to know more? Explore the Become a WITS Leader page of the WITS website at www.witsprogram.ca/kids/wits-leader/.

5. How can I get my child talking about peer conflict and bullying?

When it comes to talking to your child about peer conflict and bullying, once is not enough. Children need multiple opportunities to learn information and apply it in their lives. So how do you start the conversation?

- Children may feel their situation is unique and that you wouldn't understand. Share a story about how you were teased or left out as a child. What did you do? Did it work? Who helped you?
- Pick a book from the WITS book list at www.witsprogram.ca/schools/book-lists/, read it with your child and start a discussion. What WITS or LEADS strategies did the

characters use? Did the book remind you of anything similar that has happened in real life?

Sometimes the best way to get your child talking is through teachable moments. When watching TV or movies, talk about characters' actions and how they resolved conflicts. When your child experiences conflict with a sibling or a friend, ask which WITS strategies might help.

Want to know more? Explore the Using WITS with Your Child section of the WITS website at www.witsprogram.ca/families/using-wits-with-your-children/.

6. How can I support WITS at home?

The WITS Programs are designed to reach beyond schools to protect children from peer victimization wherever they are. Parents play a critical role by teaching children to use their WITS in a variety of situations. So what can you do to support WITS at home?

- Use WITS and LEADS to help your child solve conflicts and deal with your own. Use the language when watching TV or movies to talk about how characters handle problems.
- Talk about WITS reminder gifts. Through WITS, community leaders visit classrooms and drop off gifts, such as bookmarks, pencils and posters. When your child brings home these gifts, ask: Who gave you this? What did the visitor talk about?
- Praise your child when you observe him or her using WITS or LEADS strategies. Ask: How did you decide which strategy to use? How did you feel when it worked?

Want to know more? Explore the Using WITS with Your Child section of the WITS website at www.witsprogram.ca/families/using-wits-with-your-children/.

7. How can I support WITS at school?

A community-based approach is what sets the WITS Programs apart and getting involved in your child's school is great way to join in! So where can you start? Coordinate with your school and its parent group and work to:

- Host an information meeting at the beginning of the school year to introduce new parents to the WITS Programs and how they can support them.
- Volunteer to help with the Swearing-In Ceremony and Tug-of-Help. These assemblies, led by community leaders, kick off the WITS Programs at the beginning of every school year. Parental attendance is a great sign to children that WITS is community-wide.
- Arrange classroom visits from parents who can stop in and read a WITS book to their child's class. Use questions and activities from the book's lesson plan, available at www.witsprogram.ca/schools/lesson-plans/, to explore WITS-related messages.

Want to know more? Explore the Using WITS with Your Child section of the WITS website at www.witsprogram.ca/families/using-wits-with-your-children/.

8. What is the difference between normal and harmful conflict?

Conflict is a normal part of growing up as children develop skills to interact with those around them. Certain types of conflict, however, can be harmful. So how do you tell the difference?

Normal conflict is occasional and not pre-planned. Both individuals involved are usually upset and want a resolution. Potentially harmful conflict, such as bullying, is deliberate and intended to hurt someone. It is repeated and targets the same individual over and over.

Do you think your child is having problems with peer conflict, either as the victim or the aggressor? Visit www.witsprogram.ca/pdfs/families/symptoms-of-peer-conflict-problems.pdf for a list of signs that your child is being victimized or having problems with chronic aggression.

Want to know more? Explore the Using WITS with Your Child section of the WITS website at www.witsprogram.ca/families/using-wits-with-your-children/.

9. Why are bystanders important in peer conflict situations?

Bullying and peer victimization rarely involve just an aggressor and a victim. There are usually bystanders that can contribute to either the solution or the problem. So what's the difference between a helpful and hurtful bystander?

Helpful Bystanders:

- Seek help by reporting the incident to an adult
- Rally support from peers to stand up to an aggressive child
- Directly intervene by discouraging the behaviours of the aggressive child, defending the victim or redirecting the situation

Hurtful Bystanders:

- Do nothing during or after a peer victimization incident
- Instigate peer victimization by prodding others to engage in it
- Join in by laughing, cheering or making comments to escalate the incident

Start a conversation with your child about bystanders by taking the Bystander Quiz at www.witsprogram.ca/pdfs/families/bystander-quiz.pdf. Discuss ways he or she could make a difference as a helpful bystander, reminding him or her that you will always offer support when he or she chooses to seek help.

Want to know more? Explore the Using WITS with Your Child section of the WITS website at www.witsprogram.ca/families/using-wits-with-your-children/.

10. My child is being victimized: when and how should I seek help?

Seeking help isn't just for kids. Parents sometimes need support when their children experience bullying or peer victimization. So how do you know it's time to seek help? Ask yourself the following:

- Could someone get hurt?
- Does the situation make you feel afraid or uneasy?
- Is this something you can't handle alone?
- Did your attempts to deal with the situation not work?

If you answer yes to any of the above, it's a good idea to seek help. Check out Your Pyramid of Support at www.witsprogram.ca/pdfs/families/pyramid-of-support.pdf for suggested sources of support. Every situation is different and every source of support offers different kinds of assistance, so you may need to seek help from multiple places before getting the appropriate assistance. Remember: if at first you don't get the help you need, keep seeking help until you do!

Want to know more? Explore the Using WITS with Your Child section of the WITS website at www.witsprogram.ca/families/using-wits-with-your-children/.

Featured WITS Books

1. Featured WITS Book: *Walrus's Gift*

Walrus's Gift by H.E. Stewart tells the story of a kind-hearted young walrus who befriends a lonely human child who is teased and left out by others. The young walrus seeks advice from his elders and a community of animals who work together to solve the boy's problem, teaching him important lessons about seeking help and finding his inner strength.

Walrus's Gift demonstrates how to talk it out and seek help and shows how a community can come together to solve a problem. The book is available online at www.witsprogram.ca/schools/walrus-gift/. Read the story with your child and then try using the following questions to discuss it:

- In the story, Grandfather gives the young walrus a special shell that allows him to hear other voices and better understand the boy child. We don't have a special shell, but what other ways can we use to hear and better understand one another?
- At the end of the story the young walrus tells the boy child to look within for strength and courage. Why do you think he suggests this?

For more discussion and activity ideas, check out the Walrus's Gift lesson plan at www.witsprogram.ca/schools/books/walrus-gift.php.

2. Featured WITS Book: *The Recess Queen*

The Recess Queen by Alexis O'Neill tells the story of Mean Jean, the Recess Queen, who rules the playground with an iron fist. No one dares to question her power until a new girl named Katie Sue comes to school. Not only is Katie Sue not intimidated by Mean Jean, she actually asks Mean Jean to jump rope with her. When the two girls become friends, the playground is once again safe for all.

The Recess Queen demonstrates how to ignore and seek help and shows how one child can make a difference by befriending an aggressive child. Look for the book at your local library or bookstore. Read the story with your child and then try using the following questions to discuss it:

- Why did the recess queen act the way she did? What can cause people to act in certain ways?
- This story has a happy ending, but not all children will react the way Mean Jean did toward Katie Sue. What other ways could you handle someone like Mean Jean? Do you think an adult could have helped?

For more discussion and activity ideas, check out *The Recess Queen lesson plan* at www.witsprogram.ca/schools/books/the-recess-queen.php.

3. Featured WITS Book: *A Promise is a Promise*

A Promise is a Promise by Robert Munsch and Michael Kusugak tells the story of a little girl named Allashua who, in spite of her mother's warning about sea monsters called the Qallupilluit, goes fishing alone on the sea ice. When the Qallupilluit capture Allashua, she escapes by promising to bring her brothers and sisters to the sea creatures. With the help of her mother, father, brothers and sisters, Allashua and her family are able to protect one another from the Qallupilluit.

A Promise is a Promise demonstrates how to talk it out and seek help and shows how seeking help from a trusted adult, like a parent, is important when a situation is very dangerous. Look for the book at your local library or bookstore. Read the story with your child and then try using the following questions to discuss it:

- How do you think Allashua felt when she talked it out with her parents?
- Do you think Allashua could have fixed this problem on her own?

For more discussion and activity ideas, check out the *A Promise is a Promise lesson plan* at www.witsprogram.ca/schools/books/a-promise-is-a-promise.php.

4. Featured WITS Book: *Chrysanthemum*

Chrysanthemum by Kevin Henkes tells the story of a little mouse named Chrysanthemum. She loves her unique name until she goes to school and discovers that not everyone thinks it is as wonderful as she does. When the students meet their music teacher Mrs. Twinkle, however, they finally realize just how wonderful it can be to be different.

Chrysanthemum demonstrates how to walk away, ignore and seek help and shows how difficult but rewarding being unique can be. Look for the book at your local library or bookstore. Read the story with your child and then try using the following questions to discuss it:

- What did this story teach us about people's differences?
- What would you say to Chrysanthemum if you could?

For more discussion and activity ideas, check out the Chrysanthemum lesson plan at www.witsprogram.ca/schools/books/chrysanthemum.php.

5. Featured WITS Book: *One*

One by Kathryn Otoshi tells the story of Blue, a quiet colour who likes looking at the sky and floating on waves. Sometimes he wishes he was more like his friends Orange, Purple, Green and Yellow but he's happy being Blue – except when Red comes around. Red is a hothead who picks on Blue. Although Blue's friends feel bad, they never try to stop Red until One comes along. When One stands up to Red, the other colours learn that everyone, even Red, matters.

One demonstrates how to talk it out and seek help and shows how just one person standing up for what is right can make a big difference. Look for the book at your local library or bookstore. Read the story with your child and then try using the following questions to discuss it:

- How did One stand up to Red?
- What does "taking a stand" mean? What are some words that might be heard when people "take a stand"?

For more discussion and activity ideas, check out the One lesson plan at www.witsprogram.ca/schools/books/one.php.

Featured LEADS Books

1. Featured LEADS Book: *Mr. Peabody's Apples*

Mr. Peabody's Apples by Madonna tells the story of Mr. Peabody, a beloved teacher and baseball coach, who finds himself alone on the ball field one Saturday. He wonders where everybody is until the bat boy, Billy Little, shows up. Billy tells him that another student, Tommy Tittlebottom, saw Mr. Peabody taking apples from the market and spread a rumour he was a thief. Mr. Peabody then shows Tommy that what matters is the truth — not how things appear — and that we must choose our words carefully to avoid hurting others.

Mr. Peabody's Apples demonstrates the importance of exploring points of view and shows how powerful words can be. Look for the book at your local library or bookstore. Read the story with your child and then try using the following questions to discuss it:

- Identify a bystander who took action in the story. What were the actions of the bystander?
- What do you think the illustration on the last page symbolizes?

For more discussion and activity ideas, check out the Mr. Peabody's Apples lesson plan at www.witsprogram.ca/schools/books/mr-peabodys-apples.php.

2. Featured LEADS Book: *The English Roses*

The English Roses by Madonna tells the story of a group of girls who do everything together, including snubbing Binah – a neighbourhood girl they envy because she appears to live a charmed life. As the girls soon find out, however, appearances can be deceiving. A fairy godmother offers them the opportunity to see inside Binah’s home where they discover her life is much harder than they ever expected.

The English Roses demonstrates the importance of exploring points of view and shows how appearances can be deceiving. Look for the book at your local library or bookstore. Read the story with your child and then try using the following questions to discuss it:

- Why do you think the English Roses excluded Binah?
- If you were Binah, what would you say to the English Roses’ accusations of being stuck up and full of yourself?

For more discussion and activity ideas, check out The English Roses lesson plan at www.witsprogram.ca/schools/books/the-english-roses.php.

3. Featured LEADS Book: *Say Something*

Say Something by Peggy Moss tells the story of a girl who witnesses some children being ignored, teased and bullied at school. Although she watches these incidents, she never does these things herself. When one day she becomes the target of teasing, she realizes that being a silent bystander isn't enough.

Say Something demonstrates the importance of acting when witnessing bullying and shows the important role of bystanders. Look for the book at your local library or bookstore. Read the story with your child and then try using the following questions to discuss it:

- Why might someone ignore or just watch teasing or bullying take place without saying something?
- The quotation on the first page of the book says: “If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito.” What do you think that means?

For more discussion and activity ideas, check out the Say Something lesson plan at www.witsprogram.ca/schools/books/say-something.php.

4. Featured LEADS Book: *Jake Drake, Bully Buster*

Jake Drake, Bully Buster by Andrew Clements tells the story of how Jake changed from being a 'bully magnet' to a 'bully buster.' When Jake is in second grade he meets a boy called Link Baxter who exhibits bullying behaviours. Jake is struggling to avoid being Link’s target until one day the teacher assigns Jake and Link to work together on a class project. Through this experience Jake learns strategies to stop bullying when it happens.

Jake Drake, Bully Buster shows a variety of strategies that can be used to deal with bullying and demonstrates the importance of asking “Did it work?” to evaluate their success. Look for the book at your local library or bookstore. Read the story with your child and then try using the following questions to discuss it:

- Jake used a variety of strategies to deal with his bully problems. What were they?
- What worked and what didn't work?

For more discussion and activity ideas, check out the Jake Drake, Bully Buster lesson plan at www.witsprogram.ca/schools/books/jake-drake-bully-buster.php.

5. Featured LEADS Book: *Just Kidding*

Just Kidding by Trudy Ludwig tells the story of D.J.'s friend Vince, who has a habit of teasing people and then saying, "Just kidding!" as if this statement will make everything okay. D.J. feels that Vince's jokes often have a "sharp edge" that can "cut you into pieces." With the help of his father, brother and teacher, D.J. learns to take positive action in response to the harmful teasing and the two seemingly harmless words, "Just kidding!"

Just Kidding demonstrates how to seek help and shows the difference between harmless joking and hurtful teasing. Look for the book at your local library or bookstore. Read the story with your child and then try using the following questions to discuss it:

- What is the difference between having fun with others and making fun of others?
- How do you let your friends know when their joking feels like harmful teasing?

For more discussion and activity ideas, check out the Just Kidding lesson plan at www.witsprogram.ca/schools/books/just-kidding.php.