

## The WITS Programs

The WITS Programs bring together schools, families and communities to create responsive environments that help elementary school children deal with peer victimization. The WITS acronym stands for **W**alk away, **I**gnore, **T**alk it out and **S**eek help and represents strategies children can use when faced with conflict.

WITS also provides a common language for adults, both in the school and in the community, enabling them to communicate positively and proactively about peer victimization and to respond effectively to a child's requests for help.

## What is peer victimization?

Peer victimization is the experience of being a target of a peer's hurtful teasing and aggressive behaviour.

While perpetrators of peer victimization are often viewed as deserving to be punished, they too are often victimized by their peers. Therefore, children on both sides of peer conflict need support.

Approximately one in 10 children are persistently victimized by their peers and episodes of victimization can become more chronic over time. Bystanders who observe peer victimization without responding to prevent it can make the situation worse.

But we can make a difference. By working together to create safe schools and communities, adults can learn to respond effectively to children's reports of victimization.

## Other Useful Tips for Teachers

- **ON THE PLAYGROUND** – If there is a big crowd of students, go over and make your presence known to help prevent possible victimization situations.
- **IN THE CLASSROOM** – Have students create a classroom environment that values an openness to discuss peaceful resolutions for peer conflicts.
- **IN THE STAFF ROOM** – Talk with other teachers to share solutions and responses to peer victimization and to provide support to one another.

## Additional Resources

### Books

- *Easing the teasing*. By Judy S. Freedman. Published by McGraw Hill (2002).
- *Cyberbullying and cyberthreats*. By Nancy E. Willard. Published by Research Press (2007).

### Websites & Online Resources

- Society for Safe & Caring Schools & Communities: [www.sacsc.ca](http://www.sacsc.ca)
- PREVNet: [www.prevnet.ca](http://www.prevnet.ca)
- *Bullying among young children: A guide for teachers and carers*. Australian National Crime Prevention Program. [http://www.ag.gov.au/agd/WWW/rwpattach.nsf/VAP/%281E76C1D5D1A37992F0B0C1C4DB87942E%29~Bullying+Teachers.pdf/\\$file/Bullying+Teachers.pdf](http://www.ag.gov.au/agd/WWW/rwpattach.nsf/VAP/%281E76C1D5D1A37992F0B0C1C4DB87942E%29~Bullying+Teachers.pdf/$file/Bullying+Teachers.pdf)

*This pamphlet was developed through an ongoing collaboration among the Rock Solid Foundation and researchers from University of Victoria's Centre for Youth & Society.*

# Responding to Peer Victimization

## A Resource for Teachers



**Creating responsive communities for the prevention of peer victimization**



# How can you help address peer victimization?

- 1. Respond immediately and appropriately to reports of victimization** – Meet with students on both sides of the conflict to discuss how they could respond appropriately in future situations. Encourage children to talk about their experiences rather than telling them what they should think and use this to inform your response.
- 2. Support students on both sides of the conflict** – Follow up with both students to see how they have resolved the situation. Involve them in pro-social group activities to build confidence and inspire responsible behaviour.
- 3. Work with families of children involved in victimization** – Focus on children’s behaviours rather than on who is to blame.
- 4. Use teachable moments** – Recognize victimization and intervene when you see problems by helping children resolve the conflict peacefully.
- 5. Help children support and empathize with each other** – Tailor classroom activities to develop an open and accepting environment where children are comfortable communicating with you and each other.
- 6. Read WITS Books with your students** – Use WITS books to open a discussion on peer victimization and peaceful conflict resolution strategies. You can find a list of books online at [www.witsprogram.ca/schools/book-lists/](http://www.witsprogram.ca/schools/book-lists/).
- 7. Use WITS to solve your own conflicts** – If students see you using your WITS to deal with problems, they will better understand how WITS strategies can be used in many different situations and environments.
- 8. Offer praise when students use their WITS** – Encourage your students to use their WITS and address conflicts positively and proactively.

“ This type of program and talking about these things with students helps to build the classroom community which makes everything – down to a math lesson – a lot easier. If the tone in the classroom is one where students speak about things and know that they’re safe to talk about them... they feel safe being a learner in that environment. ”

ALLISON BALABUCH, TEACHER

## Four Steps to Help Solve Peer Conflict

- 1. Ask what the conflict is about.**
- 2. Ask the students which of their WITS they could use to solve it. They might need to try all the WITS strategies to find a resolution.**
- 3. Ask what they think might happen if they used their WITS.**
- 4. Talk about why using their WITS is a better choice than fighting.**

