



Safety Corner

Topic: Being a Good Witness

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Learning Objective:

Students will learn the skills required to be a good witness.

Note: For each “recall” activity, there is a picture located below or you may use something in your classroom or a different picture or scene.

Most of you have probably never seen a crime committed. But if you did, could you identify specific information about the event that would help law enforcement officers solve the crime? Being a good witness is a key role everyone has in a safe and healthy community.

Being a good witness involves three critical skills:

- Being aware
- Stating the facts
- Reporting to the right person

How well do you observe the circumstances or situations around you? Study the picture below for 30 seconds.



You were the last person to see Leslie's desk before she vanished. What did you see?

- What items did she leave on her desk?
- Which of those items were sharp and potentially dangerous?
- What animal might Leslie like?
- How many watercolors are in her palette?
- What did Leslie make?

Let's look at the picture again and answer the questions.

Let's try another scene. Please study the picture below:



You were witness to several crashes yesterday. Pair with a thought partner and discuss the following questions.

- How many cars were in crashes?
- How many pedestrians were hit by a car?
- Which driver was probably NOT wearing a seatbelt?
- How many pedestrians were in the crosswalk?
- What was unsafe about the students on the scooter?



Your ability to be acutely aware of your surroundings and notice details may one day save your life or the lives of others. Keen observation skills help prevent safety hazards, avoid potentially dangerous situations, or accurately report information to authorities that may help in solving a crime. Additional skills of observation include the ability to recognize sounds, smells, and also to accurately describe directions of travel. It is important for you to be observant of where you are, at any given time, and be able to describe that location if you need help quickly. Wherever you go, practice the skills of observation, awareness and recall. Quiz yourself or your family on your ability to recall key details about places you go or things or people you see. The early development of these skills is key to staying safe always.

The second component of a good witness is the ability to state the facts. What's the difference between facts and opinions?

A fact is information used as evidence. It is an indisputable truth based on knowledge or what you may have seen or observed personally.

An opinion is a view or judgment usually based on assumptions or past experiences.

Listen to these two statements and tell me if each is fact or opinion.

- Leslie likes art.
- Leslie had art materials on her desk.

You saw Leslie's drawing materials on her desk (fact). You cannot tell from the materials on the desk whether she likes art (opinion).

Next: Fact or Opinion:

- There were four people waiting for the bus near the bus bench.
- The guy sitting on the back of the bench is creepy.

There are four people sitting or standing near the bus bench (fact). You cannot tell from looking at them if they are criminal or creepy (opinion). But it is an indisputable fact that they are there, and you have observed them.

Since you cannot tell the character of any person merely by looking at them, it is best not to engage in conversation with anyone you and your parents/guardians do not know personally. Ask your parents to make a list of people you can speak with when they are not around. If anyone approaches you who is not on the list, tell them to speak with your parents and keep moving briskly.



If you are alone and someone you don't know approaches you and tries to engage you in conversation, do not share any personal details and move to a safe, secure location. If you must ask someone you do not know a question such as, "Where is the bathroom?" do not remain to talk, just get the information, say, "Thank you," and continue to your destination.

Never go anywhere with anyone you do not know, and always tell a parent/guardian where you are going, when you are going, with whom you are going, when you will be home, and how to reach you in case of an emergency.

As a good witness, we need to be aware of our own opinions and past experiences, and ensure that we are simply stating the facts as we have seen and observed them.

An important part of stating the facts is not allowing other factors to influence our witness of the facts - including the witness or influence of other people. A good witness can state what they saw, regardless of what anyone else states that they saw.

It is okay to have an opinion but if you choose to state your opinion, let it be known that it is just your opinion.

The last skill of a good witness is the ability to report your facts to the right person.

If you saw someone being bullied or hitting another person, who would you tell?

Tell a teacher, parent, counselor, a responsible adult. If one person failed to intervene or do something, tell another adult until someone does.

If you saw someone being robbed, who would you tell?

You would tell 9-1-1, a law enforcement officer, a security officer, or a responsible adult.

If you saw a fire, who would you tell?

You would tell 9-1-1, fire department, teacher, parent, or a responsible adult.

When you are reporting the incident, you will be asked to recall vital information about it. Here is where your ability to recall details will be very important. You need to provide the following information:

Who, what, when, where, why and how.



To make a report, it does not necessarily need to be in that order; but you need to let the appropriate person know why you are calling or reporting an incident, what happened or what you saw, when you saw it, where you saw it and who you saw. Be prepared to provide key details such as the license plate (and state if you can see it), along with the type and color of the car they were driving. Try to recall the direction the vehicle was traveling when leaving, and if it displayed anything unique such as stickers or damage. Little details mean a lot! The same applies to suspects like the clothes they were wearing, or unusual physical characteristics.

If you are afraid that something bad might happen to you if someone finds out that you reported, you should share this concern with the adult immediately. They are there to keep you safe too.

Sources:

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