Talk Versus Gossip

Talking is how you spread your thought, ideas, and experiences to people around you. It's not always wrong to talk about other people. There's nothing wrong with telling other people, "I like hanging out with Jake. He tells the funniest stories!" Those words don't hurt anyone.

But when you say mean things, tell stories that you are not sure are true, or real information you know is supposed to remain private, you're spreading gossip. What if you saw funny Jake go to the Principal's office and you started wondering if he was in trouble. There's nothing wrong with that, but what if you started telling other people that Jake was in big trouble. You really don't know why he was in the principal's office, right?

But before you know it, everyone is talking about how Jake is in trouble and wondering why. Maybe he put his rubber snake in the teacher's desk, someone says. Maybe he punched a kid who didn't laugh at one of his jokes, another person suggests. Jake doesn't come back to class for a long time, but when he does, everyone wants to know what happened in the principal's office.

Jake might be a little angry or confused about all of the questions, especially when he explains, "My Mom was there to take me to a doctor appointment."

That's how rumors work. They start small and often blow up into something big that is different from the truth.

What If It's True?

Even if it is true that Jake was in big trouble - and you knew it for a fact - it wouldn't have been right to tell everyone about it. Try to stop talking about stuff that would embarrass another person. Before you blab, try this test: Ask yourself if you would want other people to know that kind of stuff about you.

Sometimes a friend will admit something to you and ask you not to tell anyone else. It can be hard not to share a secret, especially when it's something that you really want to talk about with other friends. Maybe you are not even sure why the person wants you to keep other information a secret.

When It's OK to Tell

Of course, sometimes it's OK to tell another person, especially if it involves a dangerous behavior. What if a friend brings a pocketknife to school or your friend tells you she is not eating until she loses 10 pounds? In cases like that, you need to tell a parent or another trusted adult. Telling a grown-up who can help is not gossiping.

Gossip Busters

The best way to avoid being part of the gossip mill in your school is to steer clear of kids who gossip. If you happen to hear a rumor - don't repeat it – and don't listen to it either. And when someone trusts you with a personal secret, keep it to yourself.

If you're the victim of gossip, know that this happens to a lot of people. Talking to a close friend, a sister, a brother, parent or guidance counselor can help you feel better.

At first, gossip might seem like fun. It can feel like a private little club with you and your friend whispering about another person. But if someone gossips with you, he or she might also gossip about you. And it doesn't feel good to

be on the receiving end. Stick with friends who would rather live their own fun lives than talk about someone else's! (Round Meadow Elementary School)