

Gossip and Rumors



Look at your set of cards from the activity that we did in class.



How far from 'reality' did your story of something you did or saw that was funny get? Was it close to the original thought?



The danger of gossip and rumors is that the farther the story gets from the original source, the harder it gets to tell whether it is, in fact reality. Stories that are untrue, half true, or are told about someone without their permission can be hurtful or embarrassing.

I need a volunteer. It should be the smartest person in the class.

Have you ever wanted to squeeze out a full tube of toothpaste? Well here's your chance. Ready? GO!



Now, your classmates agreed that you are one of the most intelligent people in class.

So...put the toothpaste back in the tube.



Remember, once you say something, you can NEVER take it back. You can apologize but those words are always there. Be careful what you say because words can hurt and the hurt can last much longer than you might think.

A common rumor scenario is when people jump to conclusions based on assumption, speculation and partial knowledge of the situation leading to all kinds of harmful misinterpretations.



What does it mean to 'jump to conclusions'?

I need another volunteer.



I am going to fill your hand with glitter. Then, you are to pass the glitter from one student to the next until it has gone all the way across a row of students. If you can do this, without losing ONE single grain of glitter. You will get a reward; a pack of gum.

Gossip is often like the glitter. We believe we can control it, but once it leaves our mouths we can no longer choose how the information is handled. Similar to glitter, once gossip is released, it spreads and is virtually impossible to retrieve.



Why are rumors and gossip harmful?

Words Hurt

Sometimes more, because a punch may be painful, but at least it's over pretty fast. Rumors are, quite simply, a form of bullying that's sometimes referred to as "relational aggression." When a person or a group makes up a rumor about someone or decides to spread nasty gossip, it's usually to hurt someone, break up a friendship, or make someone less popular. It's the same thing as teasing, only it's done behind someone's back instead of to his or her face.

Gossip and Rumors can be a form of Exclusion

When you spread a rumor about someone, you're sending a signal that the person is outside of the group, and somehow less worthy of friendship than others. You're making fun of that person or pointing out negative things about him or her. This can let others think that it's okay to make the person feel inferior, and make him or her an outsider.

Why are rumors and gossip harmful?

Gossip and Rumors can Destroy Trust

We need to be able to trust our friends, and gossiping and rumors can break this trust. If you tell a personal secret to a friend, and he turns around and blabs it to someone else, you might feel like you'll get burned if you ever get close to him again.

True or Not, Private is Private

Let's say your mother tells you that your friend Susannah's parents told *her* that they're getting a divorce. You don't feel bad about passing it around because, after all, it's a fact, right? Wrong! Perhaps Susannah isn't ready for people to know about her parents splitting up. It can be very painful and humiliating when other people know things about us that we want to keep private. It can make us feel like we've been violated, like something that is supposed to be just ours is now out in the open for all to see-and to judge.

Why are rumors and gossip harmful?

Believing Rumors Can Lead to Bad Choices

Letting a rumor influence your behavior is like letting someone else make a big decision for you. Let's say you hear that the Principal plans to call a Snow Day tomorrow because a blizzard's coming. Expecting a day off, you don't do your homework. The next morning, the blizzard turns out to be nothing more than a drizzle, and school isn't cancelled after all. Doh! You get zeroes on your assignments.



So what should I do?

Decide whether it's hurtful or harmless

When you hear something about someone you know and have the urge to pass it on, don't think about whether it's true or not. Instead, ask yourself these questions:

- Why do I want to pass this on?
- Would I want people to know this kind of information about me?
- How will this person feel if he or she knew this rumor was being spread?
- Will this rumor reduce this person's status or make him or her excluded from the group?

Your answers will help you figure out the right thing to do.

So what should I do?

Make the rumor stop with you! If you decide that the rumor is hurtful in some way, make a stand. Decide that you don't want to take part in spreading it. Others may continue to circulate the gossip, but you've made a personal choice to stay out of it. Chances are that the rumor will die out much more quickly than if you had joined the buzz.

So what should I do?

Don't be an audience. When someone comes to you with a rumor, try not to be an audience. This person may want to hurt somebody, or may be after attention or power. It can be hard to resist hearing some juicy dish, especially if you're bored, but make an effort to say, "I'm not interested in hearing mean gossip, thanks."

Just like with physical bullying, there are no "innocent bystanders" with hurtful rumors. Hearing and reacting to the rumor, and letting it continue, makes you almost as responsible for its damage as the person who started it. Instead, don't provide another pair of ears for the rumor-starter. If he isn't getting the reaction or attention he's seeking, he'll be less likely to do it in the future.

So what should I do?

Be a peacemaker. If one of your friends wants to hurt someone else by spreading lies or rumors, speak up. Let your friend know that this isn't the right thing to do. If you need to, find another friend who feels the same way and talk to the others together. If rumors are getting out of control and someone is being made a real victim, get a counselor or teacher involved.

So what should I do?

Respect others' privacy. If you don't want other people talking about the personal things in your life, don't do it to others. When you hear personal information about a classmate or friend, try to keep it to yourself, and don't worry about whether it's true or not. If you respect people's privacy, they'll be more likely to do the same for you. However, if a friend's secret involves a safety issue it may be time to get an adult involved.

So what should I do?

Get the facts. Most of the time, you should try to ignore gossip and rumors. But if you hear a rumor about something important, and it doesn't sound too crazy or far-fetched, ask a teacher, guardian, or parent what they think. If it's a modern legend that you find interesting, you can try searching on the Web to see if it's been proven fake or not. But remember not to believe everything you read, even on the Web!