

COMMUNITY LEADERS

Working Together for Success

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the WITS Programs is their community-based approach to preventing peer victimization. That's why the participation of community leaders, such as emergency services personnel, university or high school athletes, elders or any other adult role models interested in preventing peer victimization, is an essential element of the WITS Programs. For community leaders, the time commitment is small, but the payoff is huge – both for the students and for themselves. As firefighter Tom Woods says, the WITS Programs empower community leaders to become “five-minute heroes.”



COMMUNITIES CREATING CHANGE

The proven success of the WITS Programs depends on its community-based approach. Working together with teachers, students and families, community leaders can prevent peer victimization and respond effectively to children's requests for help. Community leaders play an essential role in the WITS Programs, promoting the WITS message through dynamic presentations and classroom visits.

But while the WITS Programs depend on community leader involvement, they also recognize how busy this group can be. Therefore, the time commitment required from community leaders is small and their role is flexible, minimizing the demand on their limited time and resources while maximizing the impact on as many children as possible.

This chapter, written for community leaders, describes their important role and provides detailed recommendations for conducting presentations and visits with students.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY LEADERS

As a community leader, you may become involved in the WITS Programs in a number of different ways. Your local school may have already adopted the programs and is now inviting you to contribute as a community representative or perhaps you have learned about the WITS Programs and are now encouraging schools in your community to get involved. No matter how the WITS Programs are initiated, your crucial role is the same.



From Emergency Services Personnel to Elders

How the WITS Programs' Community Role has Evolved

When school police liaison Tom Woods helped launch the WITS Primary Program in the late 1990s, he envisioned the programs' community presence would consist of people like him: school-based police liaisons who would offer a friendly community presence for children.

As the program grew, however, so did the number of adult role models wanting to contribute. In 2005, the program expanded the community role to include paramedics and firefighters. More recently, elders in Aboriginal communities have been suggested as supporters for the WITS Programs.

In response, WITS has extended the community leader role. From emergency services personnel to elders, all adult role models with an interest in preventing peer victimization among elementary school children are welcome to participate as community leaders, contributing their experience and influence to reinforce the WITS message.

This includes young adult role models such as university or high school athletes who can participate in a supportive capacity, helping other community leaders deliver the program elements outlined in this chapter.

As a community leader, you are not solely responsible for teaching the WITS Programs. Your task is to provide positive first contact with children as a community role model, demonstrating that you are part of a greater support network that children can call on for help. Your involvement shows children that there are responsible adults outside the school walls who believe in the WITS message and are willing to help with peer conflicts before problems escalate.

In particular, you help reinforce WITS strategies by leading three special school activities: the Swearing-In Ceremony where Kindergarten to Grade 3 students are deputized as WITS Special Constables, the Tug-of-Help skit where Grades 4 to 6 students are introduced as WITS Leaders and follow-up classroom visits throughout the school year to see how students are doing with using their WITS.

The Swearing-In Ceremony

What is the Swearing-In Ceremony?

The Swearing-In Ceremony kicks off the WITS Primary Program and is presented every school year in September or early October as a reminder to teachers, students and parents to use their WITS. In a 30-minute assembly involving all students in Kindergarten to Grade 3, community leaders introduce students to the WITS acronym, read a special WITS story, teach students to stand at attention, salute and offer a secret handshake and recite a WITS Oath. The students are then sworn in as WITS Special Constables and awarded a WITS badge that is supplied by the school.

Why is the Swearing-In Ceremony important?

The Swearing-In Ceremony is important because it builds enthusiasm for the WITS Primary Program and shows children that WITS is not only used by their school community, but is something community leaders also actively support. Being sworn in as WITS Special Constables reinforces to students that, like the community leaders presenting the ceremony, they have an important role to play in their school community. They can use their WITS to keep their school safe and to help their peers.

How do we conduct a Swearing-In Ceremony?

The Swearing-In Ceremony is conducted in cooperation with school teachers and administrators. Before the ceremony, it is important to communicate with the principal or teacher at the school who will be coordinating the ceremony with you.

Together, you should review the outline of the ceremony so everyone is familiar with its elements. It is also a good idea to let school staff know about any special equipment you might need, such as an A/V system.



Watch WITS in Action

Watch footage of a WITS Swearing-In Ceremony at www.vimeo.com/15640444



Helpful Hint

Generally one community leader will take the lead in conducting the Swearing-In Ceremony; however, other community leaders – particularly young adults like university or high school athletes – can also be invited to participate. They can support the ceremony by helping to distribute badges to the children.



Additional Resources

Visit www.witsprogram.ca/schools/media-resources/ for other multimedia resources you can use to introduce WITS to the students during the Swearing-In Ceremony.

Finally, it is important to confirm the number of students that are expected to attend. The principal or teacher you are working with should make sure to acquire a badge for every student. The number of students attending will also help you determine how many other community leaders you should recruit to help you distribute the badges.

The Swearing-In Ceremony consists of five parts:

1. INTRODUCTION

Introduce yourself to the students and briefly describe your role in the community.

After describing your work, explain what the WITS acronym stands for: **W**alk away, **I**gnore, **T**alk it out and **S**eek help. Some of the children in the audience may have already been introduced to the WITS Program so try to invite audience participation in describing what each of the letters stands for.

Next, explain why WITS is important to you. Try giving examples of how you have used WITS strategies in your role in the community.

Finally, outline the different parts of the Swearing-In Ceremony that students are about to participate in.

2. READ THE SWEARING-IN STORY

This illustrated story about a walrus who helps a little boy deal with teasing at school can be found in the WITS Toolbox Chapter of this guide, beginning on page 163 or downloaded from the WITS website at www.witsprogram.ca/community/swearing-in/. If you have access to a laptop and digital projector you may project the illustrations on a large screen for students to follow along as you read the story.

3. TEACH WITS SPECIAL CONSTABLE SKILLS

In preparation for their deputization, you will teach students a few fun WITS Special Constable skills. Demonstrate each of these skills to the students and allow a brief time for them to practice with a partner.

Stand at Attention - Stand up tall with feet together, arms straight and down by sides, bottom tucked in, shoulders back, chest out and chin up.

Salute - The salute is always “long way up and short way down.” Stretch your right arm straight out to the right, and then bend at the elbow to bring hand to head. To finish the salute, bring hand straight down.

Secret Handshake and Password - Extend your right hand as for a handshake. Pretending to have a flipper instead of a hand, lightly tap your right “flipper” on the inside of your partner’s right elbow. At the same time, say the secret password “Huddy, huddy!” That’s walrus talk for “Hey, how ya doing?”

4. RECITE THE WITS OATH

This is the most important part of becoming a WITS Special Constable. Request that all students in the assembly stand at attention, place their right “flippers” over their hearts and recite the following oath after you. Read just a few short phrases at a time and then have the students repeat them.

“I promise to use my WITS, to walk away, ignore, talk it out and seek help when I’m dealing with teasing and bullying. I promise to also help other kids use their WITS to keep my school and my community a safe and fun place to be and learn.”

5. DISTRIBUTE WITS SPECIAL CONSTABLE BADGES

Finally, the students are presented with their own badges, deputizing them as WITS Special Constables. It's important to relate how exciting it is to become a new WITS Special Constable and to emphasize the responsibility that comes with the badge. All WITS Special Constables are expected to use their WITS when confronted with teasing and bullying.

Before each student receives a badge, he or she should demonstrate the WITS Special Constable skills: lead each student in standing at attention, saluting and offering the secret handshake and password before giving them their badge.

The Swearing-In Ceremony ends with an inspection of the new recruits as the students line up and walk past you on the way back to their classes. Remind students that you will return for classroom visits throughout the year to check up on they are doing with their WITS.

The Tug-Of-Help

What is the Tug-of-Help?

The Tug-of-Help, a 30-minute assembly involving all students in Grades 4 to 6, generally takes place in September or early October. In this interactive skit, community leaders use a rope pull to demonstrate the power of seeking help.



Watch WITS in Action

Watch footage of a WITS Tug-of-Help at www.vimeo.com/15260369



Helpful Hint

The Tug-of-Help is meant to be fun and flexible and community leaders are invited to use their own personality to make it come alive. For those who prefer, however, a script has been created to guide community leaders through the skit. Check it out in the WITS Toolbox Chapter of this Guide, beginning on page 180.

The skit introduces students to the WITS LEADS acronym and the idea of WITS Leaders – older students who can help younger students seek help from a responsible adult.

Why is the Tug-of-Help important?

The Tug-of-Help is the official launch of the WITS LEADS Program and students' first introduction to the LEADS acronym. It's an important assembly because it strengthens the connection between older students and community leaders, reinforcing that these people are still available to help just as they were in the students' younger years. It also reinforces messages around why children should seek help when confronted with tough situations.

In addition, the Tug-of-Help introduces the idea that children in Grades 4 to 6 can become WITS Leaders who are able to provide support to their younger peers and help make their schools and communities safer places for children to be and learn.

How do we conduct the Tug-of-Help?

To conduct the Tug-of-Help, you will need to recruit another community leader (e.g. a large student athlete) who will join you during the skit to play the part of the "bully."

You should also select three WITS Leaders to participate in the skit in advance. These leaders should be students in Grade 5 or 6 who are familiar with the WITS Programs and can explain what it means to be a WITS Leader in the school.

To prepare, lay out a long piece of rope on the floor and then pick an outgoing child volunteer from the audience. Ask for the child's name and then explain quietly to him or her – ensuring the audience can't hear you – that you are going to do two rope-pulls between the child and the "bully." In the first rope pull, the child will lose. The second time, however, he or she will win.

Preparing the child for the outcome is important so that the sequence is fun and not upsetting to the child volunteer. Whisper to the child volunteer that in the first tug the audience may laugh, but that during the

second round circumstances will change. Because the audience may find it quite funny when the child volunteer initially loses the rope pull, it is important to prevent embarrassing him or her by facilitating comments from the audience.

1. INTRODUCTION

Begin by explaining that the rope on the floor is special because it represents the rights that every student has to feel safe at school. Tell the audience that you are going to demonstrate how a student can protect those rights.

Introduce the child volunteer to the audience. Remember to also introduce your partner who will represent the “bully” in this skit. Explain that the “bully” in this case has decided to pick on the child volunteer because he or she is smaller than the “bully.” Explain that this means the “bully” is going to try to take away the child volunteer’s rights by teasing or scaring him or her.

2. THE FIRST ROPE PULL

Ask the “bully” to grab one end of the rope and the child volunteer to grab the other. Encourage the child volunteer to pull as hard as he or she can in order to try to protect his or her rights. Despite the child volunteer’s efforts, the “bully” should be able to pull him or her effortlessly across the floor.

Ask the audience how they think the child volunteer did trying to defend his or her rights on his or her own, being careful to moderate comments. Ask the child volunteer, “How did it work?” The response is usually “Not so good.”

Suggest that things might go better if the child volunteer had some help and then ask the audience if any of them might be willing to help defend the child volunteer’s rights. Select the three WITS Leaders from the audience. Ask them to explain their role as WITS Leaders and then direct them to get behind the child volunteer and grab the rope.

Explain that there are others who can help as well and ask for some adult volunteers. Have the child volunteer and/or WITS Leaders select a mix of instructional and administrative school staff, parents or other community leaders in attendance. Ask each person to grab the rope behind the child volunteer.

3. THE SECOND ROPE PULL

Repeat the rope pull. This time, the bully should be pulled effortlessly across the floor.

Ask the students how they think the child volunteer did this time. Ask the child volunteer “How did it work?”

Explain to the students that no matter how big a problem seems, when they seek help from older students and trusted adults, they can overcome it and protect their right to feel safe at school.

4. INTRODUCE THE LEADS ACRONYM

Ask the audience what WITS stands for. If students have been through the WITS Primary Program, they should be familiar with the acronym. If not, they may need a little help. Explain that WITS stands for **W**alk away, **I**gnore, **T**alk it out and **S**eek help and represents strategies they can use when dealing with a conflict.

Next, ask the audience what LEADS stands for. Explain that the acronym stands for **L**ook and listen, **E**xplore points of view, **A**ct, **D**id it work? and **S**eek help. Explain that these are skills they will learn in the WITS LEADS Program and that they will use as WITS Leaders. Also, explain how you use LEADS strategies in your work in the community.

The Tug-of-Help ends with a reminder to students that you will be returning for school visits throughout the year to check up on how students are developing as WITS Leaders.

Classroom Visits

What are classroom visits?

Community leaders make five- to 10-minute classroom visits throughout the school year to see how students are doing with using their WITS or how they are developing as WITS Leaders. Ideally, community leaders should visit every two months.

At each visit, community leaders distribute visual reminder gifts, such as pencils, bookmarks and posters. Each is adorned with the WITS acronym, providing students a visual reminder to use their WITS.

Why are classroom visits important?

Classroom visits from community leaders are one of the most important pieces of the WITS Programs for students. These informal visits help to maintain the programs' community presence and give students a chance to interact with positive adult role models in the community who reinforce the WITS message. These visits remind children on a regular basis to "use their WITS" and also encourage teachers to stay involved in the program by demonstrating community support.

In addition to creating a positive atmosphere of anticipation among students, the visual reminder gifts connect the WITS Programs to the students' home. When the gifts are brought home, they can start conversations with parents about WITS and encourage families to adopt this language to discuss peer victimization.

How do we conduct classroom visits?

Classroom visits are flexible and informal, but here are some tips to help make your visit a success:

BEFORE THE VISIT

- Contact the school principal to coordinate and confirm the date and time of the visit. Ideally, the principal will be able to let the classroom teachers know you are planning to be in the school so they will be expecting your visit.
- Pick up the reminder gifts from the school office. They should be bagged in groups of 30.
- Obtain a class list and map of the school.
- Plan to dress in uniform if your professional role requires it. Young students should be able to identify you as a helping person in the community.

AT THE SCHOOL

- Check in at the school office. This is important as many elementary schools have special procedures for signing in visitors.
- Knock gently on the classroom door. The teacher may be expecting visitors but may have forgotten or may not know you are coming. If students are not in the classroom they may be in another part of the school or on a field trip. Should this happen, visit the next class and then check back. If you still cannot connect with a class as scheduled, leave the reminder gifts for the teacher at the office.
- Once in the class, introduce yourself to the students and tell them about your role in the community.
- Ask students if they know what WITS stands for: **W**alk away, **I**gnore, **T**alk it out and **S**eek help.
- Ask students to describe a time they have used their WITS. Try to connect the students' stories with WITS principles.
- If time permits, talk to the students about projects they are working on or anything else in the class which may be of interest to the group. Interactions that are unrelated to WITS are okay



Watch WITS in Action

Watch footage of a classroom visit by a community leader at www.vimeo.com/15259856



Helpful Hint

Ideally, community leaders could adopt a single class and a variety of community leaders would visit the school on a regular basis. Because of the small time commitment the visits require, a single community leader can adopt many classes. Once in the school, traveling from one class to the next does not add much extra time. Community leaders can even occasionally make assembly-style visits to reach multiple classes at once.



Additional Resources

Visit www.witsprogram.ca/schools/media-resources/ for other multimedia resources you can use to reinforce WITS messages during your classroom visits.

as they reinforce your role as a friendly community representative who is there to help sustain the momentum of the WITS Programs.

- Hide the reminder gifts until the end of the visit in order to create a sense of anticipation and surprise. Show the students the gifts and then give them to the teacher to distribute at the end of the school day.
- Remind students to use their WITS since this is the responsibility that comes with being a WITS Special Constable or WITS Leader.
- If you are visiting students in Kindergarten to Grade 3, finish your visit by having students demonstrate what they learned at the Swearing-In Ceremony: how to stand at attention, salute and give the secret handshake and password.
- Let students know when the next classroom visit will be.

AFTER THE VISIT

- Fill in the Classroom Visit Information Sheet, available in the WITS Toolbox chapter of this guide on page 184 or on the WITS website at www.witsprogram.ca/community/school-visits/ to keep track of the classes you visited and the reminder gifts you distributed.

CONCLUSION

This WITS Programs have been designed specifically to minimize the impact on limited community leader resources, while maximizing their impact on as many children as possible. By getting involved, you join a team of adults in children's home, school and community environments with the desire and skills to prevent peer victimization.

This collaboration is important. You don't have to do it all on your own. Recruit other community role models to help. Getting a variety of community representatives on board shows children that there are plenty of adults available to help them solve their problems.

Your participation in the WITS Programs can make a big difference for children who are at a very impressionable stage in their young lives so get involved, have fun and remember to always use your WITS!



Prep for
Success

The WITS Community Leaders Training Program

Increase your success as a community leader by completing the WITS Training Program for Community Leaders.

The program is a free 60-minute online training module that teaches community leaders about the WITS Programs and how they can become involved, using a series of videos, key resources and multiple choice questions. Learn more at www.witsprogram.ca/community/online-training/