
Stand Tall, Speak Up!

Classroom Guide

You are bigger than mean words

CASEL Competency: Relationship Skills

Grade Level: Pre-K–3

Duration: 40–50 minutes

Category: Safety Magic

Learning Objectives

- Learn that mean words feel big but the child is BIGGER
- Practice standing tall (shoulders back, chin up) as a physical response to meanness
- Understand the difference between TELLING (protecting) and tattling (getting someone in trouble)
- Become an UPSTANDER who speaks up when they see others being excluded or hurt

Overview & Preparation

Key Vocabulary

Upstander • Bystander • Mean Words • Boundaries • Telling • Tattling • Dignity • Stand Tall • Speak Up • Include

Materials Needed

- The personalized story
- Mirror (for stand-tall practice)
- Paper and crayons
- Role-play scenario cards
- Optional: "Upstander Pledge" poster materials

Before Reading

Connection Question

Has anyone ever said something mean to you that made you feel small? What happened to that feeling? Did it stay, or did it shrink?

Background Building

Mean words can feel enormous — like they fill the whole playground. But your child is bigger than any name, any whisper, any "you can't play." This story teaches three superpowers: standing tall for YOURSELF (shoulders back, chin up, "Stop. I don't like that."), telling until someone LISTENS (telling is protecting, not tattling), and speaking up when it happens to someone ELSE. Because the bravest kids aren't just strong for themselves — they're strong for each other.

During Reading — Pause Points

- **When mean words make the hero feel small — physically shrinking** — The hero is SHRINKING! Mean words made them feel tiny. Has that ever happened to you? What does "feeling small" actually feel like in your body?
- **When the hero stands tall — shoulders back, chin up** — Look at the hero NOW! Shoulders back, chin up, eyes forward. "Stop. I don't like that." What changed? They're the same person but they look BIGGER.
- **When the hero sees someone else being excluded and walks over** — The hero could have just walked away. Instead they walked TOWARD the kid who was alone. Why is speaking up for OTHERS even braver than speaking up for yourself?

Discussion Questions

1. The hero felt small when mean words came. Then they stood tall. What actually changed? Were the mean words less true, or was the hero stronger?

↳ Can you be hurt and strong at the same time?

2. The story teaches the difference between TELLING and tattling. Telling is when someone is being HURT and needs HELP. Tattling is trying to get someone in trouble. Can you think of examples of each?

↳ Why is telling someone brave, not weak?

3. The hero became an UPSTANDER — someone who speaks up when they see others being treated badly. Why is that harder than just standing up for yourself?

↳ What would our class be like if everyone was an upstander?

4. "Walk away with dignity" is different from "run away scared." What's the difference?

↳ Is walking away strong or weak? Can it be both?

Facilitation Tips

Children who are currently experiencing bullying may react strongly to this story. Watch for children who withdraw or become emotional. Validate all responses. The physical component (standing tall) is important — practice it as a class so it becomes muscle memory. After this lesson, create a concrete action plan: who do they tell? Where do they go? What exact words do they use? Vague advice ("just tell a teacher") fails; specific plans work.

Emotional Payoff

The shrinking moment is universally relatable — every child has felt the body-curl of social cruelty. The standing-tall moment is physically empowering and repeatable. The upstander arc elevates the story from self-protection to community protection — the child isn't just surviving, they're CHANGING the playground for everyone.

After Reading Activities

Stand Tall Practice (Mirror Work)

Duration: 10 min | Materials: A mirror or partner work

Practice the physical posture from the story: shoulders back, chin up, feet planted, eyes forward. Say the words: "Stop. I don't like that." Practice three times in the mirror or facing a partner. Discuss: how does your body feel different when you stand tall vs. when you curl in? The posture changes the feeling — not just how you LOOK, but how you FEEL.

Telling vs. Tattling Sort

Duration: 10 min | Materials: Scenario cards (pre-made or brainstormed)

Read scenarios aloud: "Someone is calling another kid names on the playground" (TELLING). "Someone cut in front of you in line" (probably tattling). "Someone pushed a kid and they're crying" (TELLING). "Someone has a bigger snack than you" (tattling). Sort together. The rule: if someone is HURT or in DANGER, it's telling. If you're just annoyed, it's tattling.

The Upstander Walk

Duration: 15 min | Materials: An empty chair, scenario setup

Place a chair at the edge of the group with a stuffed animal (the "excluded kid"). One by one, practice walking TOWARD them and saying: "Want to play with us?" or "Come sit with me." Discuss: that walk — across the playground, across the cafeteria — is the bravest walk. It takes three seconds and changes everything.

Writing Prompts

- Draw yourself standing tall. Write the words you would say if someone was being mean: "Stop. _____."
- Write about a time you were an upstander or wish you had been. What happened? What would you do differently?
- Create an "Upstander Pledge" poster for our classroom. What promises should we make to each other?

Home Connection

Family Letter

Dear Families,

Today we read "Stand Tall, Speak Up!" about three superpowers: standing tall when mean words come, TELLING a trusted adult (not tattling), and being an UPSTANDER for others. Your child practiced the physical posture of standing tall and learned the difference between telling and tattling.

Here is how you can continue this learning at home:

- Practice the stand-tall posture together: shoulders back, chin up, "Stop. I don't like that."
- Discuss the telling vs. tattling difference with real examples from your child's life
- Ask: "If you saw someone sitting alone at lunch, what would you do?" Role-play the upstander walk.

With warmth,

Your Child's Teacher

Related Books

- Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon by Patty Lovell
- Each Kindness by Jacqueline Woodson
- The Juice Box Bully by Bob Sornson
- One by Kathryn Otoshi