

## REPORTING A CRIME: WOULD YOU?

Lesson Overview	Classes Where Lesson Can Be Taught	Teaching Strategies	Links to National Social Studies Standards	Links to National Health Standards
<p>Reporting a Crime: Would You?</p> <p>Students analyze the factors that influence whether or not teens report crimes. They also learn how to report a crime if they witness one.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government</li> <li>• Law</li> <li>• Health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuum</li> <li>• Directed reading</li> <li>• Personal reflection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civic responsibilities (NSCG V.C.2)</li> <li>• Dispositions that facilitate thoughtful and effective participation in public affairs (V.D.4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and reduce health risks. (NHES 3)</li> <li>• Demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family and community health. (NHES 7)</li> </ul>

- 1 Reporting a crime (5 minutes)  
When would you report a crime? (20 minutes)  
How to report a crime (15 minutes)  
Summary (5 minutes)

### OUTCOMES

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- identify the important role of serving as a witness
- effectively report a crime in the community or at school
- examine the impact of not reporting a crime
- work cooperatively
- voice opinions
- exchange ideas with an SRO

### HANDOUT

1: How to Report a Crime

## **YOUR TEACHING PARTNER**

Street Law, Inc. highly recommends that you co-teach *Street Law for School Resource Officers* lessons with classroom teachers. State law requires the presence of a certified teacher in the classroom. If you are called out for an emergency, the classroom teacher will be able to help by continuing with the lesson. Please refer to the front section on “Preparing to teach the lessons” (pages 18–21) for more information.

## **PREPARING TO TEACH**

- Make a copy of this lesson plan for the teacher and discuss how the two of you will work together to teach it.
- Copy the handouts for students.
- Post the outcomes for the lesson.
- Look at the layout of the classroom. Pick a wall or chalkboard that students could easily line up along. The wall should be as long as possible. Make two signs, one that says “ALWAYS” and one that says “NEVER.” Hang these signs at opposite ends of a wall, placing the “ALWAYS” on the left and “NEVER” on the right.
- Write the following on the chalkboard (or on a transparency if an overhead projector is available):
  - n 12–19 years
  - n 20–34 years
  - n 35–49 years
  - n 50–64 years
  - n 65+ years
- Bring any information related to reporting crimes at school or in the community. If you have sample forms your department of school uses for witness reports, make copies for students. Be prepared to discuss whether students can report crimes anonymously.

## **ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This lesson can complement the previous lesson, “Crime Scene: Are You a Good Witness?” but they do not have to be taught together.

## **SUMMARY**

At the end of this lesson plan, there is a summary section. Students will discuss the information they have learned and clarify any concerns. This is a critical step in the learning process. Ask your teaching partner to help you keep track of time in order to reserve five minutes at the end of class for the summary.

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## REPORTING A CRIME (5 MINUTES)

**1**

Have the classroom teacher introduce you to the class.

**2**

Direct students to look at the age groups you posted on the chalkboard or overhead. Ask the class which age group they think is least likely to report violent personal crimes.

*After students have explained their guesses, tell them that people between 12–19 years are least likely to report a violent personal crime. Inform students that 12–19-year-olds report only 35 percent of violent crime and only 13 percent of thefts. (See Greene, Eleanor, Judith Zimmer, and Stephanie Bray. *Teens, Crimes and the Community. "Reporting a Crime."* Community Works. Culver, City, CA: Social Studies School Service, 1999.)*

**3**

Ask students why they think this is the case. Record their reasons on the board and save the list, if possible, to revisit later in the lesson.

*Failure to report is probably due to a combination of factors including fear of reporting, negative peer pressure, unwillingness to get friends or other students in trouble, inability (or refusal) to see some behavior as a crime, reporting to someone other than the police, belief that the incident is unimportant, lack of knowledge about how to report, etc.*

**4**

Ask students what they think would happen if more teens reported violent personal crimes to the SROs, school officials or the police.

*Police could be more effective in apprehending criminals and preventing crime. The community would be safer. Less money would be spent on crime prevention and the costs of crimes like vandalism.*

**5**

Read posted outcomes for the lesson.

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## WHEN WOULD YOU REPORT A CRIME? (20 MINUTES)

**1**

Tell the class that now it is time to examine if they would be likely to report crime. If so, under what circumstances. Give the following instructions.

“In a moment, groups of five will come up to the wall where the “Always” and “Never” signs are placed and stand along an imaginary line according to how they feel about statements that I will read aloud. You should stand at any point along the continuum that reflects your opinion.

For example, “If you would always report that crime (if you were a witness), then stand to the far left. If you would never agree to report that crime (if you were a witness), then stand to the far right. If you need more information or you think that circumstances could change your opinion then stand in the middle or closer to the end you are leaning toward.

Remember that you should be respectful of the opinions of others. You should be prepared to voice your opinions, but please do not do so until you are called on.”

Check to see if students understand the directions.



Tip: You may want to have students participate in the continuum activity in smaller groups depending on the class size. Have the first group do a few examples, and then have the next group participate. The students who are not on the spectrum will remain in their seats and evaluate the arguments given by the students along the spectrum.

**2**

Call a group of students to participate in the continuum activity. Begin by asking:

- “Would you report it to a school official if you saw someone stealing a wallet out of someone’s backpack?”

Have students select their position on the continuum. Ask one or two students from each position (always, center, never) to describe why they chose to stand there.

Ask the seated portion of the class what arguments were most persuasive.

Repeat the process with the same group of students using the following questions:

- “Would you report it to a school official if you saw someone stealing a wallet out of the backpack of someone in your English class?”
- “What if you saw someone stealing a wallet out of your best friend’s backpack?”

Ask students along the continuum to explain why they changed or did not change their positions for the three scenarios.

**3**

Check the clock. Be sure to reserve 20 minutes to complete the lesson. If necessary, select only a few of the scenarios. Repeat the above steps with the following set of questions. Have a new group of students come up.



Tip: The following prompts are examples of the types of scenarios that you may wish to use for the continuum activity. (You may wish to change the scenarios based on what you think is of interest to students or important to crime prevention at school.)

“Would you report it to a school official if ...

- you saw someone smoking in the school bathroom?”
- you saw someone selling ecstasy in the school bathroom?”
- you saw someone selling cocaine in the school bathroom?”
- you saw someone selling cocaine in the school bathroom and they saw you?”
- you saw a male student, whom you do not know, yelling at a female student in the school parking lot and hitting her?”
- you saw your friend yell at his girlfriend and heard her yell back that he is trying to kill her?”
- you saw your friend yell at his girlfriend, heard her yell back that he is trying to kill her and saw him brandish a knife?”
- you heard a girl you do not know screaming behind the bleachers of the football field that someone is trying to rape her?”
- you heard a girl you know screaming behind the bleachers of the football field that someone is trying to rape her?”
- you heard from a trusted source that a girl was raped after the football game?”
- you found a journal entry from a 9<sup>th</sup> grader that described making a bomb?”
- you overheard some 9<sup>th</sup> graders bragging about knowing how to make a bomb?”
- you saw some 9<sup>th</sup> graders hiding something inside of their large overcoats and acting suspiciously?”

## 6

Tip for expanding the lesson: Discuss the “Apathetic Bystanders” case as follows: On March 13, 1964, Catherine “Kitty” Genovese was attacked and stabbed to death in a highly populated area of Queens, New York. During the half-hour ordeal, 38 people heard Kitty’s screams for help and watched from their windows. Twice the killer was scared off by the sound of voices and the realization that he was being watched. However, both times, when it became obvious that nobody was going to call the police, the killer returned to finish off his victim. Rather than give any aid to Kitty, such as calling the police or an ambulance, all 38 bystanders chose to pull their shades, draw their blinds, and ignore Kitty’s urgent pleas for help as her life was taken by the deranged attacker.

- Why do you think the bystanders took no action?
- Did the bystanders commit a crime by not acting? Give your reasons.
- Did the bystanders do the right thing?
- Should the law hold citizens responsible for not helping in cases such as this one?

(Taken from Arbetman, Lee and Edward O’Brien. *Street Law: A Course in Practical Law* (7<sup>th</sup> Edition). New York: Mc-Graw Hill / Glencoe, 2005. page 13.)

**4**

After several crimes are discussed, have everyone sit down for debriefing. Ask:

- What, if anything, surprised you?
- When are students most likely to report a crime?  
*Possible factors include the severity of the incident, the potential danger to the community, whether they know the person.*
- Why do students not always report crimes?  
*Revisit the list explaining why 12–17-year-olds underreport crimes from earlier in the lesson. Add any additional reasons.*
- Why do you think witnesses might be afraid to report crimes?  
*Some people are afraid of being hurt in retaliation for being a witness. Some people are afraid of being labeled a “snitch”. Some people assume the police will find the criminal without their input. Some people do not trust the police.*
- Why is it important to report crimes?  
*Sample answers include curbing violence, stopping crimes like vandalism to have an effect on curbing more serious crimes, creating a safe environment, working as a community, etc. Our whole justice system would collapse without people stepping forward to be good witnesses. If people do not help the police, the criminals might hurt someone else. To get a conviction, prosecutors must have at least one witness to testify in court. If criminals know people will not step forward as witnesses, communities will become less safe.*
- What ideas do you have to encourage students to report crimes?  
*If a witness is afraid of being physically harmed, explain how police might be able to help him or her with protection. Discuss the benefits and drawbacks of being an anonymous witness and whether you encourage students to report crimes and/or potential crimes to you anonymously. Remind students that coming forward is the right thing to do.*

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## HOW TO REPORT A CRIME (15 MINUTES)

**1**

Distribute a copy of the “How to Report a Crime” handout to the class and have student volunteers read each tip. Have students take notes on any additional tips you wish to share from your experience as an SRO or police officer. Respond to questions.

### HANDOUT 1: HOW TO REPORT A CRIME

To report a crime, keep the following in mind:

1. Call the police immediately. A police officer will interview you, ask for your contact information and likely take notes on your conversation in order to complete a police form.

2. Tell the police who you are, where you are and what happened.
3. Try to stay calm. It is very important to report crimes to the police, but sometimes this can be a difficult, trying experience for the victim or witness.
4. Be honest. Tell the police exactly what you saw. If you do not know or do not remember something, do not make it up.
5. If possible, write down what you remember as soon as you can. That way, you can keep the details fresh in your mind.
6. Try to describe the scene of the crime. How many suspects were there? Did they say anything? What happened? How did they get away? If the crime was a robbery, what was taken?
7. Tell the police what the suspect looked like. Be as specific as possible by noting the suspect's age, sex, race, height, weight, hair, clothing, facial features, scars, birthmarks or any other distinguishing features.
8. Remember as many details as possible. For instance, was the suspect driving a car? If so, try to remember the make, model, color, license number and which direction it was going when the suspect drove away. If possible, write down this information.
9. Ask for an interpreter if you need one.

Later:

- You may be asked to make a complaint.
- You may have to attend a lineup or look through photo albums to try to identify the person who committed the crime. Do your best.
- If the case goes to trial, you may be asked to testify in court.

Remember, if you do not help the police, the criminal might hurt someone else.

**2**

If you have sample police forms related to reporting a crime, distribute to students and discuss.

**3**

Explain the role of SROs and any different procedures for reporting crimes or suspicious activity on school grounds.

**4**

Give teens information about how to report a crime anonymously at school and in the community.

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## **SUMMARY (5 MINUTES)**

### **1**

Ask the students:

- What is one thing you learned today that you would like to share with others?
- What questions do you still have about reporting crimes?
- How can you report crimes you witness at school or in the community?
- Why is it important to report crimes?

### **2**

Thank students for their participation and insights.

## **6**

### **MORE TEACHING IDEAS**

Help students prepare a service-learning project. Ideas might include sharing information on reporting a crime with the school community, creating a skit that raises important issues about consequences of reporting — and not reporting — crimes to perform for various audiences, developing a wallet-size card with crime stopper phone numbers and tips on how to report a crime, or organizing with a police officer or SRO their own anonymous crime-reporting system at their community center.

### **WEB RESOURCES**

For more information, please refer to the Resources section in the front of the manual.

This lesson was adapted from the following Street Law, Inc. materials:

- Chorak, Bebs and Todd Russell. "Reporting A Crime." *Street Law for Police as Community Teachers*. Washington, DC: Street Law, Inc., 1998. (This publication is no longer available.)
- Greene, Eleanor, Judith Zimmer, and Stephanie Bray. Teens, Crimes and the Community. "Reporting a Crime." *Community Works*. Culver, City, CA: Social Studies School Service, 1999. (A joint publication of Street Law, Inc. and the National Crime Prevention Council.)

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