

# INTRODUCTION

## *About this Guide*

***Using Your WITS to Prevent Peer Victimization*** was developed to support elementary school educators and community leaders across Canada in implementing the WITS Primary and WITS LEADS Programs in their schools and communities. The guide's content stems from years of collaboration among teachers, principals, school counselors, university researchers, police officers, firefighters and other adults dedicated to creating safe environments for young children. These resources aim to prevent peer victimization among elementary school children and to show adults at school, at home and in the community how to respond effectively to children's requests for help.



## WHY THIS GUIDE WAS DEVELOPED

*Using Your WITS to Prevent Peer Victimization* aims to facilitate the implementation of the WITS Programs in schools and communities across Canada.

Research indicates that children in WITS Programs schools report lower rates of physical and relational victimization than their peers elsewhere. This guide intends to give all Canadian schools and communities the opportunity to adopt the programs, customize their practical resources and learn what it means to “use your WITS.”

The WITS Programs include two components that are developmentally tailored for primary and intermediate elementary school children:

- **The WITS Primary Program** - The WITS acronym stands for **W**alk away, **I**gnore, **T**alk it out and **S**eek help and provides a common language that children and the adults in their environments can use to talk about and respond to peer victimization. This program is aimed at children in Kindergarten to Grade 3.
- **The WITS LEADS Program** - The LEADS acronym stands for **L**ook and listen, **E**xplore points of view, **A**ct, **D**id it work? and **S**eek help. This program promotes leadership and social responsibility among children in Grades 4 to 6 and encourages them to solve peer conflict situations using these five problem solving steps.



### A Principal Uses Her WITS

### How the WITS Programs began

WITS was created in 1993 when Lampson Street Elementary School Principal Judi Stevenson began teaching students four simple conflict resolution strategies: **W**alk away, **I**gnore, **T**alk it out and **S**eek help. Soon, “using your WITS” was a popular phrase at the Esquimalt, BC school.

In 1997, Lampson school police liaison Tom Woods launched the Rock Solid Foundation – a group of local athletes and law enforcement officials with a mission to provide violence prevention programs to children and youth. Woods and the Rock Solid Foundation teamed up with Principal Stevenson, local teachers and counselors and University of Victoria psychology professor Dr. Bonnie Leadbeater and her research team. Together, they pioneered the WITS Primary Program for Kindergarten to Grade 3 students.

As the program spread through Greater Victoria, a question emerged. Where do older elementary school students fit in? The answer came in 2005 when the Rock Solid Foundation and UVic collaborated with Frank Hobbs and Lake Hill Elementary Schools in Victoria to pilot the WITS LEADS Program for Grades 4 to 6.

The new program reflected this age group’s developmental advances and adopted a new acronym focused on understanding other’s perspectives and inner worlds: **L**ook and listen, **E**xplore points of view, **A**ct, **D**id it work? and **S**eek help. Like the WITS Primary Program, WITS LEADS was met with success and made widely available in 2006.

These community-based programs are delivered in the school and supported by the students' families and communities with the complementary goals of preventing peer victimization among elementary school children and teaching adults to respond effectively to children's requests for help.

This guide facilitates the implementation of the WITS Programs by providing detailed lesson plans corresponding to popular children's books that teachers can integrate into the curriculum, comprehensive instructions on conducting special assemblies and classroom visits for community leaders and practical resources to reinforce the WITS message at school, at home and in the community.

## WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR

The WITS Programs recognize that preventing peer victimization in young children requires more than simple acronyms and social skills programs. It requires a community of dedicated adults who work together to create a network of school and community role models who are responsive to young children's reports of peer victimization.

This guide is intended for all members of this network, including elementary school educators, community leaders, such as emergency services personnel (e.g. police, firefighters and paramedics), elders, university and high school athletes, as well as any other adult role models who are interested in preventing peer victimization in their communities.

This community-based approach is what sets the WITS Programs apart. Unlike social skills and conflict resolution programs, the focus of the WITS Programs is not on the individual child but on the whole community. By reaching beyond schools and classrooms, the programs unite community leaders, educators and parents to protect young children from peer victimization and rely on committed champions in both the community and the schools for effective implementation.

## HOW THIS GUIDE IS ORGANIZED

This guide is a collection of lessons, activities, lists of recommended children's books and other practical resources that have been used successfully by teachers, community leaders and families to support children facing peer victimization.

In this guide, you will find the following chapters:

- **Community Leaders: Working Together For Success** - Includes recommendations, ideas and tips to guide community leaders in their interactions with children and the school community.
- **Educators: Great Ideas for Teaching WITS** - Presents lesson plans and instructional strategies created by educators for educators to

---

## ICONS USED IN THIS GUIDE

---



### Watch WITS in Action

*This icon is used to point to online videos demonstrating WITS concepts or activities.*



### Helpful Hint

*This icon provides tips for readers, suggesting ideas to help them implement the WITS Programs effectively.*



### Additional Resources

*This icon is used to point to additional resources both online and in this guide that can supplement WITS Programs activities and support its messages.*

effectively integrate the WITS message into the curriculum. These include French language lessons and lessons with Aboriginal themes.

- **WITS Toolbox: Resources You Can Use** - Provides printable posters, pamphlets, bookmarks and other resources that can be used to extend and support the WITS Programs. This section also provides a summary of provincial and territorial learning outcomes that can be achieved through WITS Programs lessons, as well as information on research evaluating the programs' effectiveness and references on both the programs and related issues of peer victimization.

Throughout the guide, you will also encounter the icons to the left. Read their descriptions to learn more about what each one signifies and then use them throughout the guide to find carefully selected videos, resources and tips that will enhance your use of the WITS Programs.

## CONCLUSION

*Using Your WITS to Prevent Peer Victimization* is designed to provide educators, community leaders and other concerned adults the resources they need to effectively implement the WITS Programs in their communities and reduce peer victimization among young children. The guide clearly outlines the main activities and messages of the WITS Programs and provides tools to help deliver them.

Yet, a key component of the WITS Programs is flexibility. The number of ways you can implement the WITS Programs in your community is limited only by your imagination so get creative, have fun and remember to always use your WITS!