
WHAT TO DO:

- Model honesty. Parents are the most powerful models in their children's lives.
- Discuss your family's values and morals. You will help your child build character by encouraging him/her to take action to repair a lie.
- Teach about honesty. Tell examples from your life or read stories that teach a message of trust and truthfulness. Discuss situations that may make telling the truth difficult at times (i.e.; embarrassment, fear, etc.).
- Let your child know that we are all tempted to tell "little white lies" from time to time. Point out the negative effects lying has on relationships and self-esteem.
- Help young children understand the difference between fantasy (make-believe) and reality. Teach children to identify a "wish" or a "want" versus fact or reality.
- Children need to experience the benefits of telling the truth. Consider a less severe consequence when children are truthful about a misdeed. Let them know you appreciate when they are honest in a difficult situation.
- Do not reward lying by ignoring it and allowing your child to "get his/her way." Avoid lengthy arguments that distract from the issue at hand. Enforce consequences in a matter-of-fact way.
- Give a child the benefit of the doubt unless you have clear proof that he/she is lying.
- Make it clear to your child that trust is earned.
- Do not encourage children to be untruthful in an attempt to trap them in their lies, such as asking them if they have done their homework when you know they have not. Instead, ask them "when will your homework be finished?"
- Look for underlying reasons that your child may be lying and develop a solution.
- Avoid calling children liars. This is a label that they may feel a need to live up to in the future. Children try to live up to our expectations, keep these expectations positive.
- Seek professional help for persistent lying. Underlying problems may need to be addressed.

RESOURCES

Books for Children

A Big Fat Enormous Lie by Marjorie Weinman Sharmat.

Don't Tell a Whopper on Fridays by Adolph Moser.

Let's Talk About Lying by Joy Berry.

Pinocchio by Carlo Collodi.

The Berenstain Bears and the Truth by Stan and Jan Berenstain.

The Emperor's New Clothes by Hans Christian Andersen.

The Boy Who Cried Wolf by Tony Ross.

Books for Parents

How to Help Children With Common Problems by Charles Schaefer and Howard Millman.

The Nine Most Troublesome Teenage Problems and How to Solve Them by Lawrence Bauman, Ph.D. and Robert Rich.

The Parents Guide: Solutions to Today's Most Common Behavior Problems In the Home by Stephen McCarney and Angela Bauer.

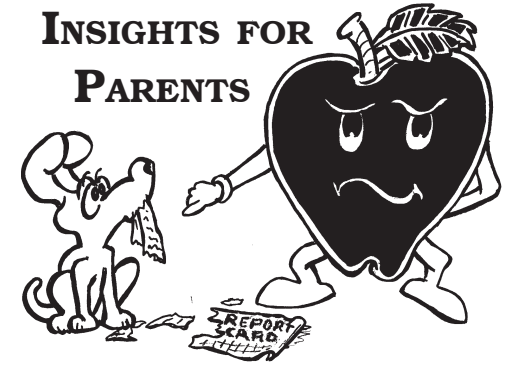
This brochure is a resource provided by LPS School Social Workers...because families matter.

Updated December 2005



WHY CHILDREN LIE:

INSIGHTS FOR PARENTS



Lying is very upsetting to parents. It's hard to know how to respond when you catch your child in a lie. Appropriate responses should be based on the age of the child, the specific situation, and the family's values about lying. While parents should never excuse lying, it helps to understand why children are dishonest at times. It is not unusual for children to experiment with lying at some point in their development.

There are many reasons that children lie:

- to test the difference between reality and fantasy
- to avoid blame or punishment
- to boost poor self-esteem
- to impress others
- to get something they want
- to protect themselves and/or others
- to deny painful memories and/or fantasies
- to show general hostility towards others (poor impulse control)
- because they hear their parents lie
- because lying has become a habit



Preschool children use wishful thinking by making up stories or exaggerating a story into a tall tale. Since young children enjoy hearing and making up stories, this is considered a normal activity and not necessarily lying. Children of this age often blur the boundaries between reality and fantasy in their play.

Elementary school-age children may lie to elevate their self-esteem or social standing, for example, claiming to have met a famous person or having a rare belonging. In children's games of one-upmanship, lies of this nature are seldom of concern unless done on a continuous basis. A child this age is more likely to be dishonest to avoid punishment, gain a reward, or humiliate another.



Middle school-age children frequently utilize lying as a defense mechanism to protect their self-esteem. Children at this age are insecure, afraid of making mistakes, distrustful of adults and may see their parents as the enemy. Middle school teenagers value their privacy and they may fib to protect their rights to it. They may develop the habit of spontaneously lying to avoid anything that seems to put them or their friends in a bad light.



Older teens will sometimes be evasive when sharing information. In an effort to exercise their independence, older teens may not deliberately lie, but may tell half-truths, wherein they fail to disclose pertinent facts. Teenagers want to keep their options open and do not necessarily want to spell out what those options are to adults. Teens may not feel they have to be accountable to adults, nor do they want others to restrict their decision making. Relationships are very important to older teens, some may believe that lying to spare other's feelings is acceptable.



WHEN TO BE CONCERNED

Lying which May Indicate Emotional Problems

- If children develop a habit of frequently lying over a long period of time.
- If children lack remorse about lying which results in taking advantage of or harming others.
- If children who know the difference between telling the truth and telling a lie repeatedly make up stories in order to gain attention.
- If children consistently lie about their social status to enhance their self-esteem.
- If previously responsible teens begin to tell ongoing lies in order to cope with stress and the demands of parents, teachers, friends, etc.
- If chronic lying is used to rebel against rules and/or restrictions.
- If lying is used to cover up another serious problem, such as suspected drug or alcohol use or abuse issues.
- If there is sudden increase in lying (this may indicate that something is wrong in the child's life such as family problems, school difficulties, bullying, etc.).

Be aware that if an early pattern of lying goes unchecked, it can become very destructive in children's personal and social lives.