

STEP BY STEP



TO EFFECTIVE PARENTING

DEALING WITH LYING

By Ruby M. Johnston

About Step by Step

Parenting is both an exciting and challenging journey. Having a child to love, nurture, and encourage is a blessing. However the journey is filled with challenges which are sometimes puzzling and at other times frustrating. This booklet and others in the series are designed to help you sort through the steps in helping a child grow and develop to reach her fullest potential.

Each booklet contains core information on parenting attitudes, skills and abilities. There are activities to work through to help in applying each strategy. While the booklets contain information which can lead to more effective parenting, it may not answer all the questions a parent might have in the area presented. It is therefore recommended that each and every parent join the thousands of other parents in the journey for lifelong learning. Parenting is a step by step learning process.

We invite you to read all our titles and join us in one of our many different training sessions. We look forward to walking together with you step by step to effective parenting!

Sincerely,

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DEALING WITH LYING

As a parent, we all want our children to tell the truth. Honesty is important to us. Healthy relationships are built upon trust, honest communication and responsibility. Parents are committed to helping children grow and develop and learn to establish their relationships on this foundation of honesty.

However, children sometimes lie and the normal intervention techniques often fail in dealing with this problem. A more comprehensive set of interventions are often needed to address lying.

Children will “pretend” at certain ages. It is the parents’ responsibility to help the child know the difference between “pretending” and lying. The age of the child is important to consider. For example, a child 3 years old will tell “tall tales” about different things they are doing or are interested in. “My truck is a lion now and it is telling me to be strong!” This is common for a child of this age. He is not lying, he is telling a tale or “pretending!” His life is full of fun and imagination and the stories just make his play more interesting for him.

However, it is important for parents to help their child know the difference between “pretending” and real. Distinguishing between honesty and lying is a foundational concept in your child's development. Children over 5 years of age will begin to understand the difference between right and wrong, real and “pretend”, and honesty and lying.

The literature says the primary reason young children lie is they fear being punished if they tell the truth. They might even be afraid of the adult reaction, fearing the adult or parent might stop loving them if they tell the truth. However there are other reasons as well:

- They want to protect someone.
- Because the truth is boring and the lie is exciting.

- To avoid something unpleasant – like going to bed.
- By speaking too quickly and making a mistake.
- For love or approval when they know the truth would get the opposite, “Did you make your bed?” and the child says “Yes.”, knowing the bed is not made, but will be shortly.

You might not be able to keep your children from lying, but you can make telling a lie a less rewarding experience. In this booklet we will help you understand the following:

- Techniques to prevent children from lying.
- How to cope with lying.
- Understanding punishment and the impact on lying.
- Parents’ responsibility in developing honesty in children.
- 7 great tips to deal with lying.



TECHNIQUES TO PREVENT CHILDREN FROM LYING

When talking to children, it is important for the parent to present information in such a way that children are encouraged to tell the truth. For example, you do not want to ask a child a question when you already know the answer. Don't ask, "Did you make your bed?" when you know the bed is not made. Rather, ask, "Are you ready to go into your room and make your bed now?" Questions like this are much more effective because they keep the conversation focused on what has happened that is factual and what the parent wants done as a result.

Use caution when asking necessary questions. Although you may need to ask questions, don't ask questions which back your child into a corner and tempt them to tell a lie as a way out. When children pressured or backed into a corner, they are tempted to lie to look good in the eyes of their parents.

Avoid asking many questions in a row. Asking multiple questions can produce negative emotions. Children may feel telling a lie is the best way of ending these negative feelings.

Don't punish your child for telling the truth.

Finally, look for the positive intent behind the lie. Often, children are attempting to survive in the adult world by seeking approval, acceptance and love. Lies might just be a way of coping with a difficult situation. Help them to see how telling the truth is most acceptable, even if the truth is difficult to tell.



HOW TO COPE WITH LYING

One of the perpetual problems that many parents face is lying by their children. Parents will often personalize this problem and view it as a sign that their children lack respect for them. Parents may also believe that their parental authority is being undermined when their children distort the truth.

It is important that parents recognize that all behavior is purposeful, even the habit of lying. Some lying is a common feature of the human experience. Rather than focus on the specific lies told by their children and the implications of those lies, parents would be well-served in trying to understand the purposes underlying their children's need to distort the truth.

When parents confront their children about their pattern of lying, they may inadvertently make the problem worse. Parents may unintentionally promote a power-struggle and cause their children to actually become more deceptive about their behavior.

I believe that parents need to rethink their perspective for dealing with their children when they lie. I recommend that parents never use the word lying in front of their kids. Use of the word lie sets up an adversarial dynamic. It is preferable to use phrases such as "you need to be more up-front with me" or "you need to be honest with me". This relaxes the encounter and makes it more likely that you will get to the bottom of the situation. -James P. Krehbiel



UNDERSTANDING PUNISHMENT AND THE IMPACT ON LYING

Do I Punish Lying? by Dr. Timothy Quek

When we get to the "bottom line", many parents want to know if they should punish a child for lying, and if so how. Recall that one of the main motivators of lying is fear. Many children choose to lie because it seems the lesser of two evils, and they imagine they could get away with it.

The dilemma regarding punishment for lying is that the parent may risk reinforcing fear, thus increasing the likelihood of lying in the future, rather than decreasing it!

In addition, there is the risk of confounding the message of the punishment. While the parent is saying, "I'm punishing you because you lied", the child may be thinking, "You are punishing me because you found out the truth." For the child, punishment is not associated with lying but being found out. The next time around, the child finds new ways to misrepresent the truth, and the parent is left in a quandary of suspicion and distrust.

Consider some important issues regarding punishment and lying:

1) The problem is that punishment is not designed to teach and reinforce an alternate behavior. Punishment without loving and careful instruction is a useless tool, and one that often leads to excessiveness and abuse.

2) Punishing a lie when it is motivated by fear tends to be ineffective in the long run. Seek the deeper motivation for the lie and work at the source rather than the symptom.

3) Use punishment as the last option, not the first reaction. Parents are often surprised how soft messages excel in impact over hard messages. For example, "You really hurt mom and dad when you lie," is often more effective than, "I'm really going to hurt you because you lied."

Above all, recognize that the purpose and desire of every parent is to encourage honesty. That is a characteristic, not just a behavior. When all is said and done, we want our children to love the truth, not to fear it; and to hate lies, not merely the punishment that lying brings.

Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it. Proverbs 22:6



PARENTS' RESPONSIBILITY IN DEVELOPING HONESTY IN CHILDREN

Persistent Denial of Observed Misdeeds ("I didn't do it!")¹

Frequently, deliberate denial in a preschooler is a sign the child has low self-esteem. He builds himself up by telling fanciful stories and protects his weak sense of self by denying misdeeds. If the behavior is habitual, he needs our help.

- **Remain calm.** A severe scolding or punishment often results in more lying!

- **Avoid setting the child up to lie** (even though you know he is at fault) by demanding: "Did you do that?" His instinctive reply will be "No!" Angry adults and harsh consequences may simply frighten a child into continued lying.

¹ Faber, A., & Mazlish, W., (1982). *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*. New York: Avon Books. ISBN # 0-380-57000-9.

● *Never shame the child or imply that he is a liar.* "You are lying, and you know it!" This reinforces in the child's mind that he is a liar. The more he believes this, the more he will lie. Simply state your observation: "Writing on the wall is not allowed."

● *Help the child break free from the role of liar.* Point out his own honest statements and courageous actions: "Billy, I asked where Erin's new whistle was and you said it was in your pocket. Thank you for helping by telling the truth. You are honest and also courageous!" If the child reverts to lying remind him that you believe lying is not typical of him: "Why Billy, I'm surprised. Usually you are very good at telling us the truth. Remember when..." Before the habitual lying can stop, the child must believe that deep inside he really is an honest person.

● *Distinguish for the child the difference between his behavior and himself.* Young children often believe good people do good things and bad people do bad things, so denying a misdeed is a way of coping with the problem of wanting to be a good person.

● *Meet the child's need for attention* by recognizing appropriate behavior.

● *Give the child an opportunity to make amends for the misdeed* (cleaning up the mess, apologizing for hurt feelings, offering to share, returning an item). This teaches "a better way" and reinforces in his own mind that he really is a good person.



7 GREAT TIPS FOR DEALING WITH LYING - A GOOD SUMMARY!²

1. Avoid setting them up to lie: Don't ask leading questions, especially in a disappointed tone as your child will know about this tone and try to avoid the follow-up consequences. If you know (with great certainty) that your child has done something wrong then simply state "I am very disappointed that you did XXXXX", if they respond "I didn't" then avoid getting into a question and answer type debate, simply state the facts upon which you have based your conclusion: "I saw you do this.... you were the only person in that part of the house... etc". Having stated the facts there must be a consequence for the attempted denial. Consider sending the child to a room or "time-out" spot to consider what they did and their response to you. After the time-out encourage the truth from your child and close the matter.

2. Focus on a solution: Often it will be an accident that has resulted in the need to lie. Be careful of always allowing "accidents" as an excuse or everything may become labeled "it was an accident". Look at what led up to the event and talk about a solution. "I know that you did not mean to break the lamp but the reason was that you were throwing a big ball in that part of the house and this should not happen anymore. Now let's clean up the mess together..."

3. Be direct and honest: If it really sounds like you are being told a lie by your child then tell them so... "That doesn't sound like the truth to me. Tell me the details please?"

4. Don't always forgive for the truth: Once you hear the truth you should avoid "instant forgiveness"... "Since you told the truth you won't be punished" will not get you far in the discipline game. Instead focus on the consequences of the event and finding a solution and an appropriate disciplinary result, avoid getting angry in this scenario but

² Minti.com Pty Ltd.

remain calm to respect the fact you have heard the truth. Let the child know that you appreciate them having told the truth but that there still must be consequences, then reinforce to them that if they had lied the consequence would have been a lot worse!

5. Manage your own expectations: Often children lie because they don't think they are living up to your expectations. Take a long hard look at what you expect from your child and see if you should provide a little more wiggle room for their development. Particularly look at how you respond to their perceived short-comings or inadequacies.

6. Be a role model: Don't let yourself fall into the trap of allowing "little white lies" around the home and when you are out. Your child will see everything you do and when you ask your husband to say you are not home if a friend calls then your child will note this and take it as acceptable behavior. Every little action counts.

7. Seek help if it goes too far: If your child seems to be lying about everything and consistently fails to improve their behavior consider chatting to your pediatrician or school counselor or other professional for additional ideas to solve the issue.



FINAL STEP

“Remember that lying is purposeful behavior that can be minimized with healthy involvement with your children, appropriate monitoring, sensitivity and understanding, and role-modeling of honest, open, and emotionally expressive communications.” **James P. Krehbiel, Scottsdale, Arizona.**

OTHER STEP BY STEP TITLES WITH NUMBERS

1. Understanding Child Development – Birth to Two – “The Infant”
2. Understanding Child Development – Three to Five – “The Preschooler”
3. Understanding Child Development – Six to Eleven – “The School Aged Child”
4. Understanding Child Development – Twelve to Fifteen – “The Young Teen”
5. Understanding Child Development – Sixteen to Eighteen – “The Older Teen”
6. Communication – Responding to Children
7. Communication – Feelings
8. Communication – Asking Children Strength- Focused Questions
9. Communication – Being Direct with Children
10. Communication - The Languages of Love for Your Child
11. Communication – What you Say and How you Say It
12. What Every Parent Should Know About Child Abuse
13. Sharing Secrets and Keeping Surprises – James’s Story
14. Teaching Your Child to Say, “NO” – Jessica’s Story
15. Understanding Childhood Illnesses
16. Caring for a Sick Child
17. Disease and How it Spreads
18. First Aide – What Parents Need to Know
19. Home Safety
20. Childproofing Your Home
21. Teaching Safety
22. Food Safety
23. Foodborn Illness
24. Nutrition
25. Feeding Problems
26. Bringing a Foster Child Into Your Home
27. Understanding the Effects of Fostering on the Family
28. Understanding the Effects of Fostering on the Marriage
29. Guide to Dealing with Stress As a Parent
30. Guide to Building a Healthy Marriage Relationship
31. Bringing our Adopted Child into Our Home
32. Helping Children Understand Adoption
33. Joining With my Adopted Child’s Culture
34. Understanding the Birth Parent of My Child
35. The Blended Family
36. When Family Members Treat My Foster or Adoptive Child Different

37. Understanding Attachment
38. Recreating History for My Adopted Child
39. Helping the Child who has been Sexually Abused
40. Teaching about Sexuality
 - a. How to Talk to Your Child
 - b. How to Talk to Your Parents
41. Understanding Sexual Behaviors
42. Teaching Your Child about Abstinence
43. Talking to your Teen about Identity
44. Contracting with Your Teen About Behavior
45. Developing Responsibility
46. Teaching Your Child to Build Relationships
47. Teaching about Marriage and Family
48. Telling Your Child Someone has Died
49. Understanding the Grieving Cycle
50. Understanding and Approaching Behavior
51. Dealing with Lying
52. Toilet Training and Bedwetting
53. Dealing with Defiance
54. Dealing with Hitting and Biting
55. Dealing with Stealing
56. Dealing with Anger
57. Dealing with Fighting
58. The Child Who Plays With Fire
59. Helping My Child Deal with Fear
60. Helping My Child Kick a Bad Habit
61. Help with Tattling
62. Dealing with the Two Year Old's Temper Tantrum
63. Help with Thumb Sucking
64. Help with Bedtime Problems
65. Dealing with Substance Abuse
66. Understanding Suicide
67. Developing Good Study Habits for School
68. Dealing with Failure
69. Demonstrating Manners
70. Helping Siblings Get Along
71. Nurturing Optimism

MORE TITLES TO BE DEVELOPED IN THE FUTURE

RESOURCES

1. Family Resource Network, 2008. Pearson Education, Inc. *Why Children Lie and What to do About It*.
2. Minti.com Pty Ltd.
3. Effective Parenting, 2008., Lawrenceville, NJ
parent@effectiveparenting.org
4. Behavior Management Cards, 1997. Jacy Showers, Ed. D.
5. Canadian Child Care Federation, 2008. Ottawa, Ontario, K1Y 4R4. cccf@cfc-efc.ca

