

Triple P Tip Sheet

Primary Schoolers

Lying

When children often tell lies, it can be difficult for parents to trust them. Parents may find it hard to believe their children even when they are telling the truth. Telling lies can also cause problems with friends and other family members. Children need to learn that no matter what they have done, they must tell the truth. It is best to deal with lying as soon as it starts. This tip sheet gives some suggestions to help you teach your child to tell the truth.

WHEN IS LYING A PROBLEM?

Society's attitudes towards lying are complex and confusing for children. Sometimes not telling the truth or telling 'white lies' is considered to be a good thing if the aim is to protect another person's feelings. Adults often tell several 'untruths' like this in a day. On the other hand, deliberately saying something that is not true to mislead someone is not acceptable. This kind of lying is a problem because it undermines trust.

Telling stories or untruths is common in preschoolers. Preschoolers sometimes mix up reality and fantasy, so they may tell stories without deliberately intending to tell lies. However, by primary school age, children know the difference between truth and fantasy. At this age, it becomes a problem if children tell lies.

WHY DO CHILDREN TELL LIES?

Children lie for many reasons. They may lie to avoid the consequences of something they have done, such as doing something they know their parents would not let them do. Also, if children do not get any benefits for telling the truth, they may lie instead. For example, if a child tells the truth and is severely or unfairly punished, they may learn to lie to avoid punishment.

Children may learn to lie from watching their parents or other children tell lies. If children see others appearing to benefit from lying, they are likely to copy them.

Children may also lie as a way of getting attention and approval from their friends. Children may tell lies about what they have done, seen or own. Sometimes children think others will not accept them as they really are and tell stories to make themselves more acceptable to others. These children may be lonely, bored or have low self-esteem. Boastful lies often stop when a child starts school

or when they get caught out once or twice by others.

HOW TO TELL IF YOUR CHILD IS LYING

Lying can be difficult to stop if you are not sure when your child is telling the truth. Primary school children often give the truth away because they smile while telling a lie or their story just does not sound right. For example, when asked to explain why they have \$10, your child might tell an unlikely story about being given the money by a friend. Questions about when, where, who was with them or the order of events will often lead to the truth. However, some children will keep to their lie no matter what evidence there is.

HOW TO DISCOURAGE LYING

▼ Discuss the Problem With Your Child

At a time when everyone is calm, explain to your child that lying is unacceptable. This talk should not

happen immediately after your child has told a lie. Be sure your child understands that lying means deliberately saying something that is not true. Tell them you want it to stop at once.

Briefly and calmly say how lying affects you and why you think it is a problem — *Tania, I feel angry and disappointed when you lie. It makes it hard to believe anything you say. If you continue to tell lies you'll find that nobody will trust you.*

▼ Ask Your Child's Opinion

Ask your child why they felt they needed to lie. Many children will not have much to say. Others will make excuses or try to blame someone else. Avoid getting into a *Yes, but...* argument with your child. Simply tell your child that you want them to tell the truth from now on.

▼ Talk About Consequences

Decide ahead of time exactly what to do if you suspect your child is not telling the truth. Suitable consequences involve the loss of an activity or privilege, such as playing with friends, watching television or staying up late. Tell your child what consequence will apply if you suspect that they are not telling the truth.

HOW TO ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO TELL THE TRUTH

▼ Give Your Child Opportunities To Tell the Truth

Tell your child that you are going to give them opportunities to be honest. Occasionally ask your child about things you know about already. Quickly check on the facts then ask your child questions such as — *Have you tidied your bedroom?* or *Have you done your homework?* or *Have you finished raking up the leaves in the yard?* Your child can then practise telling the truth about what they have been doing. You will know straight away if your child is telling the truth because you have checked the facts.



▼ Praise Your Child for Telling the Truth

If your child tells the truth, praise them — *Thank you Nicole, for telling me the truth* — regardless of whether your child has done what they were supposed to do. The idea is to praise your child for telling the truth no matter what else has happened. You may also like to reward your child with a treat such as choosing dinner or staying up 30 minutes later. Even if your child has told the truth, use your usual approach to deal with any problem behaviour.

HOW TO MANAGE LYING

▼ Act on Your Suspicions

Take action if you suspect that your child is not telling the truth. Do not wait for proof. You may not always be able to prove that your child has lied.

▼ Tell Your Child the Problem and the Consequence

If you suspect your child has not told the truth, describe the problem — *Kevin, you are not telling me the truth about that. You have not finished raking the yard* — and the consequence — *There will be no television tonight*. Ignore protests or complaints. Do not debate or argue the point with your child. Simply carry out the consequence.

Deal with the lying first, then the problem that led to the lie. Provide appropriate consequences for both. For example, a broken lamp is found in your child's room and you suspect your child is lying about how it got there. Provide a consequence for the lying, such as no television for the rest of the day. Then provide another consequence for breaking the lamp, such as putting some of their own money towards fixing it.

Keep to the agreement and where appropriate return the activity or privilege at the agreed time. You may need to use consequences a number of times before your child learns to tell the truth.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

It can take time for children who tell lies to learn that it is better to tell the truth. You can help by setting up a contract with your child (see example). Seek professional help if lying continues to be a problem.

Contract for Telling the Truth

I _____ agree to tell the truth.
We _____ agree to give Luke opportunities to tell the truth.

Rewards

For each day that Luke tells the truth he can earn 1 point. If Luke has 10 points after 2 weeks he can invite a friend to sleep over.

Consequences

If Luke does not tell the truth, he will not get a point and he will not watch any tv after dinner that day.

Signatures

Child's name: _____ Date: ____

Parent's name: _____ Date: ____

Parent's name: _____ Date: ____

- Tell your child that the points can be exchanged for a daily reward or a larger reward at the end of the week. Decide how long your child must tell the truth to earn a point, how many points your child must earn to get the reward, and what the reward will be. Tell your child what they can earn if they reach the goal.
- Decide what you will do if you suspect your child is not telling the truth. Consequences may involve the loss of an activity or privilege as described earlier, or if your child receives pocket money, a consequence may be a fine each time they lie. For children under 10 years of age, you may choose to use time-out as an immediate consequence for lying (see *Positive Parenting* booklet). Tell your child what consequence will apply if they lie.
- Set up a written contract that you and your child sign. The contract is an agreement that says what your child is expected to do and the rewards and consequences that will follow (as shown).
- Make a chart to keep a record of points earned. Stick the chart where it is easy for you and your child to see, such as on the refrigerator.
- Each day your child tells the truth, put the points on their chart. Praise your child for telling the truth.
- If you suspect your child has lied, do not give them any points for that time period. Tell your child the problem and the consequence. Carry out the consequence as described earlier.
- At the end of the agreed time, add up the number of points your child has earned. If they have reached the goal, give them the reward.
- If your child does not reach the goal, do not give them the reward. However, do not criticise them or take away points they have earned.
- When your child is reaching the goal easily, start to phase out the rewards by making them harder to achieve. Gradually increase the number of points your child must earn to get the reward. Then gradually increase the time your child must tell the truth before earning a point, until you can take down the contract and chart.
- Continue to use consequences consistently if you suspect your child of lying.
- Continue to praise your child for telling the truth.

KEY STEPS

- Discuss with your child what lying is and why it is a problem.
- Tell your child they must stop telling lies.
- Talk about consequences for telling lies.
- Set up opportunities for your child to tell the truth.
- Praise your child for telling the truth.
- If you suspect your child is not telling the truth, act immediately.
- Apply consequences for lying and any other problem behaviour.

IF PROBLEMS PERSIST

Here is another strategy you can try if your child continues to lie.

- Explain to your child that they can earn points by telling the truth.

FOR FURTHER HELP See the *Positive Parenting* booklet for more information on positive parenting strategies. If you have any questions or have tried these strategies and are concerned about your child's progress, contact the service where you were given this tip sheet.

Triple P is a parenting program developed by Professor Matthew R. Sanders and colleagues in the Parenting and Family Support Centre, School of Psychology at The University of Queensland with funding support from Queensland Health, Victorian Department of Human Services, Health Department of Western Australia, and National Health and Medical Research Council.

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