

The Parent's Notebook

LYING



All human beings lie at one time or another. Lying is defined as the deliberate falsification of information with the intent to deceive another. It is important to recognize that very young children have difficulty distinguishing between true and false, real vs. unreal, and often display inaccuracies in their speech. Children stand much closer to their fantasies, dream world, and imagination than adults. Thus, the lines between these are often blurry. Typically, language development and comprehension have progressed by the time a child is seven or eight years of age to the point that the concept of truthfulness is well engrained. Types of lying include the following:

- **Fantastic lies:** Tall tales often serve as an escape from uninteresting or disagreeable reality.
- **Imitated lies:** Children will imitate or model the tendency of a parent or older sibling who regularly colors, exaggerates, or omits important aspects in their narrative of a life event.
- **Exaggeration or bragging lies:** Embellishments on abilities or accomplishments in order to bolster their role or power in a group or relationship. These types of lies are quite common.
- **Social lies:** These are “little white lies” and lies of convention that are again often an imitation of caregivers. An example would be, “Sorry, I can’t make the party, but I have another obligation,” when in fact no such obligation exists.
- **Defensive lies:** To escape punishment or consequences. This is probably the most common in children.
- **Negative attention seeking lies:** For some youngsters it is preferable to lie and be punished than to be neglected or be responded to with indifference.
- **Vengeful lies:** Revenge is the motivation here. The child wants to get even with someone such as a sibling or parents.
- **Compensatory lies:** To win accolades or praise from adults, peers, or others especially in families where high levels of achievement are expected.
- **Antagonistic lies:** Being negativistic or stubborn, often refusing to do with what’s being asked.
- **Pathological lying:** This is probably the most serious because it is habitual and without apparent remorse. Oftentimes the lie is expressed without discernable advantage to the child. This is sometimes referred to as “crazy lying.”

Several strategies can be employed to minimize the tendency of children to lie. First and foremost, adults and caregivers must avoid telling lies and be committed to truth telling. Address every incidence of lying no matter how apparently trivial or minor. It is important to communicate clearly that lying is undesirable and will not be tolerated in the family. Determine the reason for the lying and address as appropriate. Here it is important to identify the core issue’s underlying the reason for the lying. Opportunities for lies should be minimized. For example, if a child has broken a rule and you know it, don’t interrogate to give an opportunity for lying, simply address the infraction. Parents should not overburden their children with rules and unrealistic expectations. Finally, it is essential to reward truth telling. Sometimes parents pay attention and respond to negative behavior more than the behavior they are trying to instill in their youngsters.

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