

## Why Does My Child Lie?

The lack of honesty between parents and a child can be very stressful. Frustrated parents often ask, "Why does my child lie?" As a parent you're right to be concerned when your child is not being truthful. However, a better question to consider might be, "what are the things my child is honest about?" There are lots of things that your child is very honest about perhaps even brutally honest. Therefore, you don't want to characterize your child as a "liar." Consider your own childhood and the times you told your parents your own version of the truth, plus all the times as an adult that you're less than truthful. That said, how do you resolve this difficult situation?

First, avoid calling your child a "liar" because he or she may live up (or down) to your description. Withholding the truth happens often; the role of a parent is to help children learn how to communicate truthfully. Young children in particular often lack the skills to consistently communicate truthfully in different social situations.

Second, when a child makes a false statement there is generally something else that they would rather be true. For example if a child breaks a vase and denies it, the denial is simply a wish to reverse the situation so that the feeling of guilt and potential consequences might be avoided. One way to address a situation like that might be to ask your child, "What do you think should happen if a person breaks a vase and says I'm sorry for breaking the vase?" An open-ended question like this minimizes shame and guilt but provides an opportunity to teach honesty and accepting responsibility.

Third, fear is often a significant factor when children withhold the truth. Fear is a powerful emotion and often interferes with our ability to think clearly. Children can experience fear even more intensely than adults. A child may decide to withhold the truth for fear of disappointing you; he or she may fear that being truthful will result in more trouble. A child might also withhold the truth attempting to protect another person. Lastly, your child may have learned that a mistake is something to hide rather than an opportunity to learn and grow.

Children who feel secure in their relationship with parents (or caregivers) are less fearful and thus more able to consistently communicate honestly. Put differently, children who feel loved unconditionally are more able to be truthful.

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05/15/2014