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## What Can I Do If My Children Lie?

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## A weekly question/answer column

# What Can I Do If My Children Lie?

*Tom Lee\* answers:*

Most adults will admit to lying as a child. In fact, being totally honest as an adult is pretty difficult to master. Yet we are distressed as parents when children are less than truthful. Honesty is the goal, but we probably shouldn't take lying as a sign of defective character. Rather, we should look for the reasons for the lying.

Often, children lie because they are scared of the consequences of telling the truth. Sometimes they lie because their self-esteem is shaky and they fear we won't love them if they tell the truth. If children feel safe, they will usually tell the truth. To promote this, consider these suggestions.

- Don't ask questions you already know the answers to. Sometimes our questions invite a creative answer. Instead of "Did you do your homework?" try "I haven't seen you doing homework. What's your plan?" This approach also focuses on finding a solution rather than blaming. Avoid asking "why" questions, especially with younger children. Many times, children don't know why they did something.
- Empathize with your children's situation. Try, "This must be a pretty scary situation for you if you feel like you need to lie about it." Or maybe, "You must love us a lot to be so worried about disappointing us. We want you to know that we'll always love you no matter what you do."
- Don't overreact when children tell you something you don't like. Otherwise, children get good at saying what they think you want to hear. Help children feel that mistakes can be opportunities to learn. \*Don't call a child who lies a liar. It can become a self-fulfilling label.
- Praise children when they tell the truth. Try something like "Thanks for telling the truth even though it was hard. There needs to be a consequence for breaking our rule and I'm proud of you for being willing to deal with that."
- Set an example of telling the truth. Follow through with your promises to your children. Tell them about a time you told the truth and accepted the consequences of a mistake.
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