**The Best Way to Discipline Your Child When They Lie**

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*For many parents, lying is one of the worst mistakes a child can make. However, lying is actually very common among children of all ages. According to Michael Lewis of The Institute for the Study of Child Development, most people lie at least 25 times per day. "By age two to three years," Lewis says, "70% of children lie very well."   
  
But even if lying is normal, for parents it's still a problem. Honesty is a trait that most parents want to instill in their children. Fortunately, there are ways that parents can encourage their children to tell the truth.*

## Model Honesty

The most important thing that you can do as a parent to encourage honesty in your kids is to model it. If it's true that most adults lie at least 25 times per day, then your kids have probably heard you tell a lie. You might not even notice when you're doing it, because it seems so innocent, but your kids notice. It's hard to teach them that honesty is important when you aren't always honest yourself. Be scrupulous about telling the truth, even when it makes things more difficult for you, and your children will eventually learn to copy your behavior.

## Figure Out Why They Lie

Children lie for many different reasons. It's not enough to discourage lying and teach honesty; you need to know why your children are lying. Toddlers and preschoolers often lie because they are learning how to use their imaginations and to distinguish truth from fantasy. A preschooler might tell a friend that your family owns three dogs simply because he wishes it were true. If your child is telling these kinds of lies, punishment isn't necessary--you just need to teach him that he can use his imagination without needing to lie.

Children also learn early about white lies. Children are innately social, and they are quick to imitate the kinds of lies that adults deliberately tell to avoid hurting other people with uncomfortable truth. You as a parent have probably encouraged this kind of lying; if you made your son say sorry for taking a toy from his friend when he wasn't really sorry at all, or if you made your daughter tell Grandma she loved the sweater that she actually refuses to wear, then you've encouraged this type of lying. If you want to teach honesty, then consider teaching your children ways to smooth social relations without using white lies. You can apologize to your son's friend on his behalf, thus modeling good behavior without forcing him to say something that isn't true. Teach your daughter to thank Grandma for remembering her birthday or to say something positive and true about the sweater, such as the fact that it's exactly the right size.

But perhaps the most frequent cause of lying among children is to avoid consequences for bad behavior. Children know when they've broken a rule, and they will often insist that they didn't do what they were accused of, hoping that will enable them to avoid the punishment. There are several ways to deal with this kind of lying. One is to reassure them that you will be pleased if they tell the truth and that their punishment will be lighter than if they lie. Another method, recommended by Alfie Kohn in "Unconditional Parenting," is to avoid punishments altogether. According to Kohn, punishments are nearly always ineffective, and lying is a prime example of a behavior that rarely improves with punishment. Imposing consequences on children's behavior actually encourages lying. Instead, you can discuss children's behaviors with them and work with them to solve problems. For example, if your child broke your favorite vase and then lied about it, don't punish him for either action. Instead, talk with him about how much the vase meant to you, and help him think of ways that he can make you feel better--perhaps by making you a new vase, or using his allowance to buy you a new one--and how you can work together to avoid problems in the future. He might agree to a rule of not running in the house--or he might suggest a safer place for you to keep breakable items so they won't be in danger from his exuberance in the future.

## Set Them Up for Success

Sometimes parents unconsciously set their children up to tell a lie. If you know your child hasn't started cleaning her room, don't ask her whether her room is clean--you're only offering her the temptation to lie. Instead, you can just remind her that you asked her to clean her room before she watches her favorite TV show. And when she does tell a lie, never label her as a liar: she'll be more likely to think of herself that way and thus to tell more lies in the future. If you know she's telling a lie, simply state the truth from your perspective by saying something like, "I can still see some clothes on the floor of your room. Will you please put those in the dirty hamper?"