



Encouraging Children to Tell the Truth

At times, your child confuses what they imagine with what is actually true and can spin some tall tales as a result. When children use their imagination to explore different behaviors, they're less likely to act them out in real life. Sometimes telling a lie allows your child to get what he or she wants or to avoid consequences.

Remember: Your child is still figuring out what "truth" means and "lying" is a normal part of development. However, here are a few ways to motivate your child to tell the truth.

- **Help your child become better at telling fantasy from reality.** When your child shares fantasies with you, point out what's real and what isn't, but don't insist that he or she agree with you. Remember, it is still important to celebrate your child's growing imagination.
- **Use your child's fantasy stories to understand them better.** Ask your child to share their feelings and fantasy life by asking questions. "Wow! You have three baby sisters. What is it like to live with so many babies?" Support his or her feelings. "That made you angry because you wanted book time and daddy had to feed all those babies. What did you do then?"
- **Make it clear that lying is usually worse than the crime.** Children lie to avoid losing a privilege. Give two consequences, one for the action that occurred and one for lying, and it will be more likely to encourage the truth next time. Make consequences less severe if your child tells you he or she lied.
- **Don't investigate or accuse.** This makes your child feel like they can't be trusted, or that they are bad. When you know your child is lying, don't ask directly to try and catch them in a lie. Forcing the truth out of your child doesn't encourage them to take responsibility for bad behavior on their own. Pressuring your child to admit a lie increase lying behavior in the future.
- **Make it easy to tell the truth.** Respond calmly to your child's mistakes and problems. Your angry responses encourage your child to lie. Instead, say something like, "let's try and get the marker lines you drew on the table off together." This allows your child to admit to their mistake, giving you the chance to praise his or her willingness to accept responsibility.

- **Model truth telling.** Tell the truth in front of your child. Your child's thinking is black and white, and they don't understand concept of a "white lie."
- **Read the story of the boy who cried wolf with your child.** Talk about the some consequences of lying.
- **Avoid shaming and blaming.** "Catching" your child in a lie will put him or her on the defensive. Catching your child in a lie only teaches them how to become better at lying in the future.
- **Teach your children that telling the truth takes courage.** Support your child and talk about how hard it can be to tell the truth. Offer praise about how brave they are to tell the truth before any consequences.