

Kids Who Lie

Training for
Foster Parents, Adoptive Parents and other Caregivers



Hand-out Packet

Revised 9/09

Lying . . .

To make an untrue statement
with intent to deceive

To create a false
or misleading impression



The Best Lie Ever Told

The best lie ever told by a politician:

The best lie ever told in an advertisement:

The best lie ever told to a policeman by a person stopped for speeding:

The best lie ever told by a foster child:

The best lie ever told by someone in this small group:

To Tell the Truth

Please indicate your response to each of the following statements by circling either A (agree) or D (disagree). This is not a test: there are no right or wrong answers.

1. Lying is socially acceptable behavior. A D
2. Foster children are more inclined to lie than are biological children. A D
3. People lie because they have something to hide. A D
4. Learning to lie is important to social survival. A D
5. Adults are more inclined to lie than are children. A D
6. People react negatively to lying because it is morally wrong. A D
7. Parents should confront children's lying every time it occurs. A D

Reasons Children Lie

- 1. Developmental:** The child has not developed the capacity or ability to tell the difference between truth and non-truth or fantasy.
- 2. Self-protection:** The child lies to escape the consequences of his/her behavior.
- 3. Self-fulfilling prophecy:** The child has repeatedly been accused of “being a liar” and lives up to that expectation.
- 4. Reality testing:** The child attempts to find out what is real by testing other people’s reactions.
- 5. Denial:** The child tries to rid him/herself of painful feelings and/or memories.
- 6. Fantasy:** The child’s daydreams and imagined events become real for him/her.
- 7. Protection of others:** The child feels s/he must protect others from the truth, or from the consequences of the truth.
- 8. Recognition/Peer Pressure:** The child uses lying to gain acceptance from peers or to enhance his/her reputation.
- 9. Power:** The child uses lying as a means of controlling or manipulating others, or as a way to get revenge.
- 10. Negative attention:** The child gets noticed when s/he lies.
- 11. Learning/Imitation:** The child has been taught to lie, or is imitating the behaviors of others.
- 12. Self-Concept:** The child tries to appear or feel more loveable, worthwhile, capable or responsible by sensationalizing or exaggerating the truth.
- 13. Testing Limits:** The child tries to see where the boundaries and limits are.

14. Lack of information: The child fills in gaps in knowledge with “made-up” information.

Responding to Lying

1. When the child lies, ask yourself the following:
 - a. What is the child's reason/motivation for lying?
 - b. Are there certain situations that predictably lead to lying?
 - c. What are my feelings when this happens?
 - d. Are my feelings and/or reactions a clue as to why the child behaves this way?
 - e. Do I need to gather more information about the situation before taking action or making a response?

2. Given the child's reason for lying, follow through on one or more of the following responses:
 - a. Look for ways to teach the child appropriate behavior, not to punish the child for inappropriate behavior.
 - b. Use Reflective Listening to demonstrate your understanding of the child's underlying needs/feelings.
 - c. Meet the underlying needs/feelings.
 - d. Ignore the lying behavior and acknowledge the child and/or his/her behavior when s/he is not lying.
 - e. Provide/offer the child accurate information so she does not have to rely on her imagination to fill in the gaps.
 - f. Establish rules and enforce them consistently if the child is testing your reactions.

3. To confront a lie directly:
 - a. Be absolutely sure that the child has lied. Rely on what **you** saw or heard, not on what others said they saw or heard.
 - b. Do not accuse the child of lying or being a liar.
 - c. Use an I-Message to clearly describe the specific behavior and its impact on you. Saying, "I was so worried when you told me you would be at Hannah's house but you weren't" is much more effective than saying, "I didn't like it when you lied to me about being at Hannah's house" or "Why did you lie to me about being at Hannah's house?"

- d. If the child is developmentally unable to tell truth from fantasy, help the child develop this skill by gently pointing out when the truth becomes fantasy. For example, state “Oh, now you’re telling me a story . . . I like this story”.
4. To prevent/reduce lying behavior:
- a. Demonstrate honesty yourself.
 - b. Demonstrate acceptance and safety so the child does not feel s/he must protect him/herself from you.
 - c. Give the child attention when not lying.
 - d. Help the child to feel loved, valued, capable and responsible.
 - e. Build a trusting relationship with the child.
 - f. Provide the child with accurate information.
 - g. Help the child talk about his/her feelings and fears.
 - h. Clearly and directly communicate expectations, limits and rules. Enforce them consistently so that the child does not have to test them.
 - i. Don’t ask “why” questions.
 - j. Don’t ask the question when you know the answer.
 - k. Be patient.

Listening to Reason

For each typical lie, identify the possible reason(s) which might motivate the creation and telling of that lie. Next, pick one of the possible reasons that you listed. In the last column, identify a parental response which might be effective for dealing with the lying behavior. Make sure that your response is directly related to the “reason” you chose.

Typical Lie	Possible Reason(s)	Parental Response
1. When the child is asked by his peers why he is in foster care, he tells them it is because his parents got killed in a car wreck.		
2. An 8-year-old recently freed for adoption has been telling neighbors and friends that she is going home to her birth parents next week.		
3. You overhear your 15-year-old foster child telling her friends that you let her drink alcohol at home.		
4. Your 16-year-old foster child is out two hours past curfew. His friend’s mother has just called to see if her son, Justin, is at your house (where he said he would be). Upon returning home, with dilated pupils and glassy eyes, your foster child says he spent the evening at Justin’s house eating pizza and watching TV.		

Typical Lie	Possible Reason(s)	Parental Response
<p>5. For the past six weeks you have been caring for a 13-year-old girl who came into your home as a result of being sexually abused. Yesterday, the foster dad put his arm around her shoulder in the kitchen to demonstrate affection and support. Today, the SW called to tell you that the girl said that the foster father made sexual advances toward her yesterday.</p>		
<p>6. Your six-year-old foster child frequently takes things that belong to other people (e.g., keys, mail, toys) and hides them. When asked if she has seen these items she says “no” and follows you as you search for the “lost” article.</p>		
<p>7. Someone calls on the phone for your oldest child. Although she is home, a younger child tells the caller that she isn’t home and hangs up the phone.</p>		

In Conclusion . . .

- Lying can often be traced to the child's attempt to meet certain needs or feelings.
- Identifying the reasons/feelings and meeting the underlying need or feeling is the first step toward changing this behavior.
- Adults must be aware of how their emotions influence the effectiveness of their response to lying.
- Don't ask "why" questions. "Why" questions create anger, defensiveness and hostility, and imply that the child has the ability to explain the motivation behind his/her behavior. This may cause the child to "lie" in order to create a reason or excuse the behavior.
- Don't ask the question if you already know the answer.
- Remember a child's developmental age may be much lower than a child's chronological age.
- Use Reflective Listening to help the child recognize and understand feelings that may be motivating the lying behavior.
- Remember that we all perceive a situation in our own special way, based on our own history and expectations. What we may see as a "lie" may be a child's perception of the situation.
- Accusing the child of lying won't change the behavior. Instead, the child may become defensive, withdraw, alienate, or tell more lies to cover the first.

- Adults must model honesty and truthfulness if it is a standard to which they hold children.