

FSHS Fact Sheet

Excerpt Highlights:

...is that a lie?

...dig deeper for
the facts...

...afraid of truth.



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Pierzynski, Interim Director.

How Should We Respond to Lying?

If you think a child is lying to you, consider these eight steps.

1. *Step back and consider what lying really means: **being deliberately untruthful to mislead another.*** If a child tells you something he or she believes is true even if it is unreal, is that a lie?
2. *Consider the child's age.* Preschool children are primarily egocentric. They do not scheme to manipulate your thinking. Fear can suddenly make them want to believe something is true. They cannot understand why lying is wrong, especially if it gets them what they want or enables them to avoid something unpleasant.

3. *Stay calm but firm.* Introducing strong emotions like fear and anger in a response to what you think might be a lie can panic a child. Strong emotions are not compatible with clear thought.

4. *Focus on the facts.* Never bait a child into lying. If you know the facts, stick to them and deal with the consequence. Don't ask a child with chocolate icing on his face if he has put his finger on the birthday cake. Don't ask a child if she got into trouble at school if the teacher has already called you before the child came home. If you know what they did, then dig deeper for the facts and respond to the problem.

5. *Consider what motivated the lying.* Lying motivated by greed is different than lying motivated by fear. Then look for solutions.

6. *Teach the importance of telling the truth.* Show the child how to be honest.

Talk with them about the importance of truth. Here are three ideas you might convey during middle childhood:

Lying is theft. *When you purposefully tell me something false, I act as though what you told me is true. What you then obtain from me is like stealing through false information.*

Lying pulls people apart because it destroys trust. *I want to trust you. I don't want to doubt you. Lying deeply saddens and disappoints me.*

Lying shows that you are afraid of the truth. *You are stronger than that. You can show courage and stand up for what is true.*

7. *Express your disappointment and respond with reasonable consequences.* A deliberate lie should not be casually dismissed. After your response, be sure to restore the child to your good graces. Avoid excessive guilt and shame.

8. *When a child is truthful, especially under difficult circumstances, express your admiration.* Never show disapproval when a child is truthful. So when the five year old smells his aunt's perfume and says, "That's stinky" don't deny what the child believes.

A child who persistently lies may not respond to your efforts. Consult a mental health professional if a child continues to lie to get what he or she wants and has no guilt or remorse for having done so.

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