

COUNSELING CORNER

Monthly School Newsletter from Lutheran Counseling Services

Car Conversations

In the car, classroom or dinner table, try some of these ideas to build this trait in yourself, your family or your class.



- Talk with kids about a book, movie, TV show or video game character who was impacted by dishonesty. Brainstorm ways the plot could have gone differently to promote honesty. What could each character do? Why was there dishonesty in the first place? Can they relate to a temptation to lie? How might they have responded if they were in that scenario? Teachers and adults can also honestly share their own reflections, temptations and how they would hope to have responded.
- As a class or family, play the game 2 Truths and A Lie in which each person shares 2 things that are true about themselves and one thing that is false. Other players guess which is the lie. Talk about how it felt to lie and how easy or hard it was to guess others' lies.

Honesty & Trustworthiness

Instilling honesty in children is a top priority for most parents. Yet how can parents respond when children veer from honesty into lying? And how common is this?

To answer these questions, we can look at the work of Dr. Kang Lee, who has studied deception and lying for decades. Namely, he notes that children as young as 2 years of age lie, and that children's abilities to lie increase with age to about the age of 12. Unfortunately, he notes that parents are only slightly better at detecting lies in their own children than chance guessing. While this can be disheartening, it also shows that lying is a part of the developmental process, and one that equipped parents can help children to navigate.

To guide kids toward truthfulness and trustworthiness, we need to look at why they may lie. Children may tell "fantasy lies" that stem from their imagination such as what an imaginary friend told them. Others may tell a "white lie" (typically beginning around age 6) that benefits someone or avoids hurt feelings. They may tell a self-serving lie to be seen a certain way, avoid punishment, or to gain something. Understanding why a child is lying can help parents create an environment that promotes honesty and truth.

For developing brains, consequences are not understood until the late teens, and into the early twenties. This means that highlighting the negative impacts and consequences of lying may not be an effective way to address lying behavior. Research shows that promoting the positive elements of honesty is more effective in reducing lying than highlighting the negative consequences of dishonesty. Also, according to the ADCAT model of deception (Activation-Decision-Construction-Action Theory), if the cost of honesty is higher than the reward, people of all ages will lie.

Dr. Joanne Stern, psychotherapist and author, shares several tips to help set the stage for kids to be honest. She recommends talking about honesty early and often alongside helping kids



- Talk with kids of every age about what personal information is safe to share with others, and who those others are. Also talk about what information to keep private. Role play how to answer questions that are too personal so kids know how to answer without dishonesty.
- With younger children, watch and listen to [this catchy song](#) about honesty and examples that may present a temptation to be dishonest. Talk with kids about what they relate to from the song or what other scenarios should be added. Talk about how being honest builds trust and why this is important.

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understand that honesty builds trust and healthy relationships with family members and friends. She also encourages parents to model honesty, to share age appropriate honest responses, and to choose honesty even when difficult, such as paying a higher price for something by being honest about a child's age. And finally, she encourages more emphasis to be placed on honesty than on punishment for dishonesty: Be firm on honesty and gentle on kids.

Help the child understand the value of honesty and that it builds trust and open, supportive relationships, and may lead to more privileges as a result. Praising children for telling the truth, even if it is about their poor choices, sets the expectation of truth and its importance. Set them up to tell the truth by praising their honesty. For behaviors you know they did, start by asking questions about the behavior (ex: why did you go against our screen time policy?) rather than asking if they did it, which may set them up to lie rather than be truthful.

Consider 1 Peter 3:10 *Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit.* It is God's plan for us to speak the truth. We cannot lie to God; He knows our true hearts. And He loves us unconditionally. Clearly guiding children to honesty by making honesty an easier path to follow in our homes is a great start. While the behavior may lead to consequences, it is important that children know that their parent's love for them is unconditional.

References:

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