

WHY DO CHILDREN LIE?

Children might lie to:

- cover something up so they don't get into trouble
- see how you'll respond
- make a story more exciting
- experiment – for example, by pretending something that happened in a story was real
- get attention or make themselves sound better
- get something they want – for example, 'Mum lets me have lollies before dinner'
- avoid hurting someone's feelings – this sort of lie is often called a 'white lie'.

Children lie more at 4-6 years. They might get better at telling lies by matching their facial expressions and the tone of their voices to what they're saying. If you ask children to explain what they're saying, they'll usually own up.

As children grow older, they can lie more successfully without getting caught out. The lies also get more complicated, because children have more words and are better at understanding how other people think. By adolescence, children regularly tell white lies to avoid hurting other people's feelings.



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Encouraging children to tell the truth

Once children are old enough to understand the difference between true and not true, it's good to encourage and support them in telling the truth.

You can do this by **emphasizing the importance of honesty** in your family and helping children understand what can happen if they lie.


Here are some tips:

- Have conversations about lying and telling the truth with your children. For example, 'How would mum feel if dad lied to her?' or 'What happens when you lie to a teacher?'
- Help your child avoid situations where they feel the need to lie. For example, if you ask your child if they spilled the milk, your child might feel tempted to lie. To avoid this situation you could just say, 'I see there's been an accident with the milk. Let's clean it up'.
- Praise your child for owning up to doing something wrong. For example, 'I'm so glad you told me what happened. Let's work together to sort things out'.
- Be a role model for telling the truth. For example, 'I made a mistake in a report I wrote for work today. I told my boss so we could fix it'.
- Use a joke to encourage your child to own up to a lie without conflict. For example, your preschooler might say, 'My teddy bear broke it'. You could say something like, 'I wonder why teddy did that?' Keep the joke going until your child owns up.



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