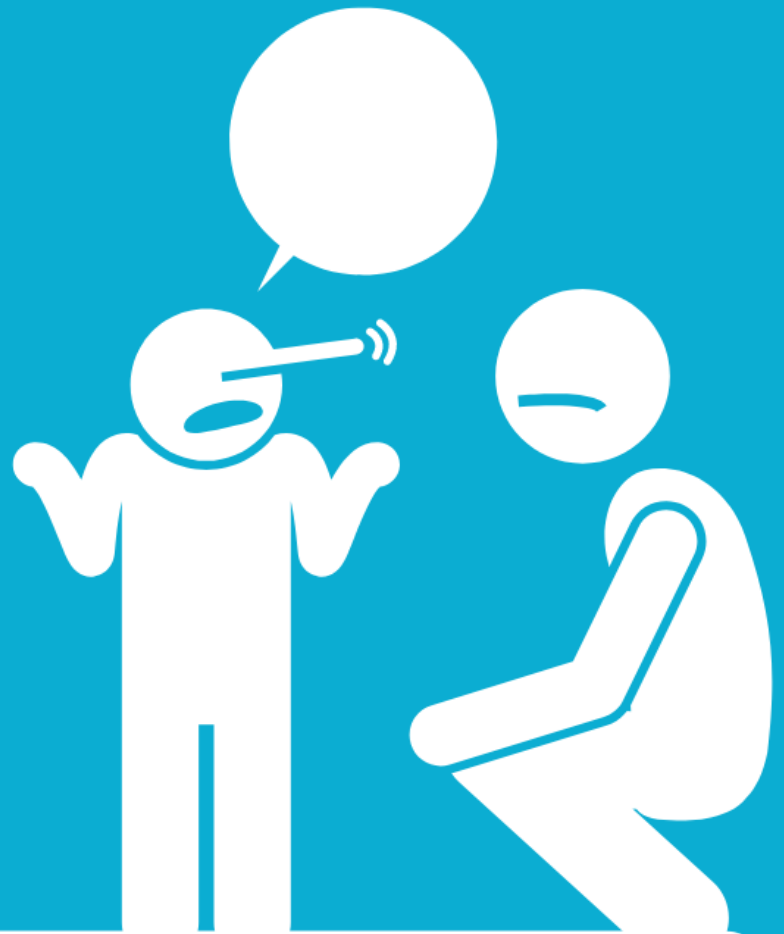




Prof. John Sharry  
Parents Plus



# What to Do When Children Tell Lies?

# 1. Understand the Reasons

The first step in helping your child, is to understand why they have not told the truth. Young children tell lies or evade telling the truth for lots of reasons such as:

- to avoid getting into trouble  
"I didn't break the glass"
- to get out of something unpleasant  
"the teacher did not give us any homework today"
- to gain attention or approval  
"I won the star in school" ...etc



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While you don't agree with their lying, you can **be understanding** about the reasons behind the behaviour.

Communicating your sympathy and understanding to them gives space for them to back down and tell you what happened.

**Then** you can help them explore other ways of dealing with the situation without resorting to lying.



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## 2. Reduce Opportunities

Avoid putting your child in a position where they might tell a lie. For example, rather than asking, "Did you take the cake?" when it is obvious they have, instead you could say: "I see you took a slice of cake without permission, we have to have a chat about that."

You can also warn your child if you think they may not answer a question truthfully, for example: "Before you answer, you know I will find out if you had homework on Monday."



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### 3. Calmly and Gently Confront

If your child tells you a lie, gently and calmly confront this, for example, "I know you broke the toys", but avoid over-reacting emotively with, "How dare you lie to me". Instead, talk calmly and take action to deal with the issue.

Sometimes, it is appropriate to have a consequence for lying and this can be in addition to any consequence for the original behaviour: "Because you made the mess, but also because you didn't tell the truth immediately, you lose some TV time. It is really important that you learn to tell the truth to Mam and Dad."



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## 4. Praise Telling the Truth

It is also important to praise your children any time they tell the truth, particularly when this is hard for them.

For example, if they come to you and say that they broke something in the house, you can **first** say that you are pleased that they have come to tell you, before you deal with the issue of something being broken.



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## 5. Model Honesty and Trust

Children learn most by what parents **do**, rather than by what parents tell them to do. So if you model honesty to children this helps them to behave that way.

This can mean owning up and apologising when you have made a mistake or let someone down, being straight and honest in how you talk to your children and your partner.



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## 6. Address Underlying Issues

There are often simple underlying issues that you can address. For example, if a child makes up stories to gain approval ("I won a star in school"), you could work hard to ensure they get approval independent of these achievements or you can explore how they could gain the star legitimately.

You could say: "It sounds like you really want a star. If you do your homework well, you might be able to get one - would you like me to help you?" or "I know another way you can get a star: I will make a star chart at home and each time you clean up the dishes, I will give you one. Would you like that?"



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## 7. Teach about Telling the Truth

It might be useful to have a sit-down chat with your child about the importance of honesty and telling the truth. There are lots of good stories you can read together about the importance of trust (such as 'The Little Boy who Cried Wolf' ) that can teach these values.

The long-term aim is to help your child understand the value of honesty, the importance of talking truthfully to parents and how to resolve difficult situations without resorting to lying.



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