

After the Buzz, social thinking ideas for parents and caregivers

From *What's the Buzz?* for Early Learners: A complete social skills foundation course



Lesson 12 of 16: Honesty – telling the truth

After the Buzz offers ideas for parents, guardians and educators to encourage the generalisation of the social skills the children have gained in the session. Children rely on continuing commitment to consolidate these skills by modelling them, and emphasising the language and the ideas used in the lesson.

Here are a few ideas parents can work with at home to support the quality of their child's honesty.

The starting point

Remember that the vast majority of children lie at times. Please understand that when your child is dishonest it is a snapshot of their point of development. Try to see it this way rather than feeling as though they have committed an awful 'sin'. Young children are at the mercy of many fickle life forces such as poor impulse control, jealousy, greed, competitiveness and much more, and given this, they will often blurt out a lie to cover up and wiggle out of trouble! It's important to treat the lie in a straightforward manner that will eventually promote honesty, and discourage deceit.

Just talk about it

Generally, there are three reasons children tell lies: fantasy, bragging or to prevent an unfavourable outcome.

1. *Preschoolers often tell fantasy lies:* "I went to Sea World this morning," they might say. "Oh? Is that something that's really true or make believe?" This can help youngsters see the difference between reality and pretend.
2. *Some lies are inspired by a child's need to brag:* It may be that they were feeling unconfident at the time or wanted to gain attention.
3. *All kids lie to get out of trouble sometimes:* Always state, very briefly and matter-of-factly, that you will double-check the facts and get back to them.

Role-model honesty

As always, role-model the behaviour you want from your child. There is no other way – it takes truly truthful work to demonstrate honesty. Children quickly pick up on what's going on around them. For example, Grandma might phone and ask if she can drop by for a visit but your child overhears you saying you are about to go out even though it's not true (you simply don't want Grandma to call over). Children pick up on your dishonesty. If you do find yourself in a situation like this, use it a precious moment to let your child know that you told a lie.



We tell the truth

Promote your expectations about honesty by having a family rule that states, 'We always tell the truth to each other'. Explain that everyone makes mistakes, but owning up rather than covering up with more lies will always cause trouble. Telling the truth versus hurting the feelings of another is a skill that children can benefit from discussing. For example, children need to know that it is not necessary to announce to their friend, "That's an ugly T-shirt," just because they don't like it and want to offer an honest opinion. Balancing honesty with care is a sophisticated social skill sometimes referred to as using a 'white lie'. This is always a work in progress.

A helpful warning

It can be helpful to give kids one warning when you are confident they're lying, but never call your child a liar.

When you think you've heard a lie try this: "Don't give me an answer right now – I'm busy – but when I come back you must tell me the real truth." Then, walk away! Allowing kids a little thinking time is a great option. When you think they're about to lie try this: "I notice you haven't brushed your teeth. You can show me your teeth now, or you can go and clean them."

When you think you've heard another lie try this, "I can give you one chance to tell me what really happened. If I catch you lying, you will receive an extra consequence."

When you think you've heard yet another lie try this: "Hey, we all make mistakes. It's important for you tell me the truth. I'll give you a couple of minutes to think so you can tell it."

Hopefully your child will feel safe enough to give you the truth. The idea here is to tread lightly and show empathy, as tell-offs are merely a blunt tool when it comes to achieving honesty or obedience. Make it clear that lying is not useful and they will be held accountable.

Next, it's time for the correction. To do this you might say, "What can we do to stop this from happening again?" Let your child come up with solutions. Let them own it. Then move on.

A natural consequence

Talk about the natural consequences of lying. Explain that if they lie too often it will be hard for you to believe them, even when they're telling the truth. Read the story of, 'The Boy Who Cried Wolf' – or watch it on <http://vimeo.com/8663457>. This story portrays that there's no believing someone who lies, even when they're telling the truth!

An optimistic change

If you feel that your child has a wicked habit of telling lies, why not develop a plan to help them rebuild honesty and trust? You can easily set up a simple behaviour agreement that links more privileges with their willingness to be more honest. When you catch your child telling the truth, praise them and say, "I know it was hard to tell me you broke that glass, but I'm so glad you were honest about it." Reward the truth. Focus as much as you can on what they are doing right. So, when your child is truthful, particularly when they own up to something without being prompted, praise their bravery and honesty.

Photocopiable and Online Resources

These resources can also be downloaded from www.whatsthebuzz.net.au