

Fibs and Lies... *The Truth of the Matter*

By Julie Mitchell

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Children fib to see what they can get away with; teens often lie to protect their privacy and to establish their newfound independence. We all assume that teens shield the truth about issues they know would disturb us—such as online encounters and accessible alcohol, drugs, and sexual behavior. So how do we know when our teenagers are lying, and what should we do when we realize that they are?

According to Anthony Wolf, a practicing child psychologist and the author of several books on parenting, including “Why Can’t You Shut Up? How We Ruin Relationships—How Not To,” most teens lie. “They [feel] they will either get in trouble if their parents find out, or if they tell the truth beforehand, they won’t be allowed to do whatever they intended to. Parents want their kids to be safe and honest, but teens want to do what their peer group is doing, regardless of the level of risk involved.” Lying, Wolf says, is all part of the package.

Solutions

#1 Stay One Step Ahead

“Learn to ask specific questions and get specific answers,” Wolf says. “Teens would rather not directly disobey their parents.” Wolf feels that most punishments, such as grounding and withdrawal of privileges, won’t stop teenagers from being dishonest. Staying

connected through the use of cell phones and email, knowing who your children’s friends are, and having a continuing open dialogue are all ways of fostering an honest relationship. Don’t wait until your children are teenagers to talk to them about drugs, sex, alcohol, and relationships—all things they’re liable to lie to you about later.

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#2 Open the Door to Discussion

Rather than lecturing your teen, try to get to the bottom of the reason for the lie. And listen to your child’s opinions and feelings, even when they differ from yours. “My son broke down in tears when I confronted him about giving a party with alcohol while we were away for the weekend,” said Sean, 47. “I simply told him how upset and worried I was, and that he had both hurt and disappointed me and his mom. That was all it took, and it hasn’t happened again.” Make it clear it is important for you to know details. Did your teen lie about a test grade because he thought you would think he or she would fail in school? Try and get them to open up and explain why they felt the need to

(Continued next page)

(Fibs and Lies continued)

fib in the first place—and assure them they won't get in trouble for telling the truth.

#3 Be a Good Role Model

If your children catch *you* being dishonest, they'll be more prone to stretch the truth themselves. Don't lie, and don't tell your teen you stretched the truth. In order to foster trust, always keep your word and apologize if you do break a promise. Make sure your teens know that lying is unacceptable, but realize that there are times when they will lie anyway.

#4 Give Them Another Way to Be Independent

All teens need to establish their independence as part of forging their identity. Allowing your children to make their own choices (within reason) will teach them about responsibility and help them grow.

You may not like your daughter's super-short skirt or your son's sagging pants, but if you give them some leeway in selecting their wardrobes, they'll appreciate it. Then, when it

comes to more serious matters, you can take a strong stand. For example, if they lie to you about grades, they have to own the outcome of it. After all, this is their issue, not yours. In the long run, they're only hurting themselves if they can't admit to what they've done.

Tips to Keep Lying to a Minimum

- Don't tell lies. Be a good role model.
- Work to foster an open, honest relationship at home early on.
- Ask specific questions and demand specific answers.
- Don't give them the chance to lie.
 - Make them check in with you before they leave the house for school.
 - Make it a house rule that they call you if they're going to be late or are going to a new location.



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