

Reasons Why Some Children Lie

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Children, who have experienced early childhood neglect and trauma, very often have difficulty with telling the truth. The reasons are varied and some or all may contribute.

1. Children were taught that lying is acceptable and usual because their primary caregivers did not tell the truth to the child or to others. Lying was part of the norms and culture of the family.
2. Children who were neglected or traumatized often have to lie to their primary caregivers to get their needs met or to protect themselves from harm.
3. Children may have been punished excessively and were therefore afraid to accept responsibility for their actions. They learned to blame others.
4. If speaking for convenience rather than being limited to the truth was the norm for the family of origin, children simply are unclear about truth, the need for truth and the connection between reality and the words said about it.
5. The relationship with a harmful parent did not provide the relational basis for the development of empathy; that is, understanding the experience of the other. Therefore, the effect on the other person of lying is not experienced by the child.

Lying is resistant to change because:

- 1. It is more difficult to unlearn than learn in the first instance.**
- 2. It is easier to lie to a stranger. The lack of intimacy in the relationship reduces empathy and consideration of the other person's experience of lying.**
- 3. Children with a history of trauma and neglect try to block their history from their conscious experience. They try to suppress the truth and create a better / happier / safer narrative; that is lies are better than reality.**

Lying will diminish when child is:

- 1. safe**
- 2. secure in their life**
- 3. attached to a permanent primary caregiver**
- 4. empathy is learned and practiced**
- 5. Their history is accepted as their true reality.**

What to do when your child lies:

- 1. Don't expect your child to tell the truth. Sometimes changing our expectations helps to reduce frustration. Expect that truth telling is very hard to do. Recognize and celebrate when your child tells the truth.**
- 2. Be empathic in your child's struggle to tell the truth.**

- 3. Teach empathy: help your child understand how their lie affects others.**
- 4. Use your own judgement about what happened and act on that without trying to gather evidence or testimony. Don't expect that your child will be able to admit wrong doing or take responsibility until they feel safe, secure and stable in their life. Celebrate when they do!**
- 5. Focus on repairing the situation quickly and simply.**
- 6. Repair the relationship after a lie has been told and move on. Try to avoid bringing up old transgressions.**