

No More Lies

Telling the truth is something God cares about, and therefore it should matter to us.

Lying is a problem every parent faces. All children distort the truth from time to time, and some become inveterate liars. Responding appropriately is a task that requires an understanding of child development and the characteristics of a particular individual. What follows is some general advice that will have to be modified to fit specific cases.

First, understand that a young child may or may not fully comprehend the difference between lies and the truth. There is a thin line between fantasy and reality in the mind of a preschool child. So before you react in a heavy-handed manner, be sure you know what he understands and what his intent is.

For those children who are clearly lying to avoid unpleasant consequences or to gain an advantage of some sort, parents need to use that circumstance as a “teachable moment.” The greatest emphasis should be given to telling the truth in all situations. It is a virtue that should be taught—not just when a child has lied, but at other times as well.

During family devotional time with your children, turn to Proverbs 6:16-19 and read that insightful passage together. It says, “There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers” (NIV, emphasis added).

After reading these verses, point out to the child that in a list of seven things the Lord hates most, two of them deal with dishonesty. Telling the truth is something God cares about, and therefore it should matter to us. This will explain why you are going to insist that your son or daughter learn to tell the truth even when it hurts to do so. Your goal is to lay a foundation that will help you underscore a commitment to honesty in the future.

These are powerful verses around which to structure Bible-reading time with your kids. Explain who Solomon was, why his teachings are important to us and why the Scripture is our friend. It is like a flashlight on a dark night, guiding our footsteps and keeping us on the right path. It will even protect us while we are asleep, if we will bind it on our hearts forever.

Memorize the passage in Proverbs together so it can be referenced in other contexts. Use it as a springboard to discussions of virtues and behavior that will please God. Each verse can be applied to everyday situations so that a child can begin to feel accountable for what he does and says.

The next time your child tells a blatant lie, you can return to this discussion and to the Scripture on which it was based. At some point, when you feel the maturity level of the child makes it appropriate, you should begin to insist that the truth be told and to impose mild punishment if it isn't.

Gradually, over a period of years, you should be able to teach the virtue of truthfulness to your sons and daughters. However, for a child who is in the teen years and continues to lie, parents should share from Revelation 21:8: "All liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur"

(emphasis added). In this passage, Jesus Himself made clear that a person will not be held blameless if he continues to distort the truth.

Of course, you can undermine everything you're trying to establish by being dishonest in front of your kids. Believe me, they will note your example and behave likewise. If Mommy and Daddy can twist the truth, they'll have little authority to prevent their impressionable little ones from doing the same.

Dr. James Dobson is founder and chairman of the board of the nonprofit organization Focus on the Family (Colorado Springs, CO 80995). Material is excerpted from *The Complete Marriage and Family Home Reference Guide* and *Bringing Up Boys*, both published by Tyndale House.