



Lying Summary

Why Lying?

Trust is an essential foundation for healthy relationships. There are intentional ways to grow a healthy parent-teen relationship, and understanding how to promote a trusting relationship with your teen, one in which they tell you and others the truth, is key.

Step 1. Get Your Teen Thinking by Getting Their **Input**

- *“Who do you trust and why?”*
- *“What’s important to you about honesty?”*
- *“Have you ever been lied to? How did it feel?”*
- *“When are you tempted to lie?”*
- *“What’s the worst thing that could happen if you tell the truth about a misbehavior?”*

Discuss challenges. In Step 2, plan to teach what they can do instead.

Tip Teens don’t want to be in the spotlight. And at times, questions can feel like an interrogation, so look for comfortable windows of opportunity to introduce the questions. For example, is your teen telling you about a friend who lied to her parents? Or, are you watching someone lie on a reality television show together? Those are ideal moments to move into these kinds of questions.

Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Model honesty. Modeling honesty can mean sharing aloud what you might be thinking when you are saying how you feel: *“I am tempted to say I feel fine, but the truth is that I am upset about a conversation I had at work.”*
- Teach your teen to take a breath before answering. It gives your teen a moment to allow their thinking brain to catch up with their reactive/emotional brain and allows them the opportunity to share a more honest response.
- Talk with your teen about the impact of their lies on you. You could say, *“I am sad that there is something about our relationship that isn’t safe enough that you need to lie to me.”*
- Catch your teen telling you the truth, particularly when it is difficult for them. You can say, *“I know it was hard to tell me the truth, and I so appreciate you taking the risk.”*
- Talk about trust and how it is built slowly but can be broken quickly.

Tip At a family meal, share a personal story about how trust between family members has been critical in a safety or other important situation. Talk about how you come up with alternative solutions when you are tempted to lie.

Tip and Trap Moving forward in development is a human need. But parents or other influencers in a teen's life can halt development through fear, guilt, or shame. These teens are the most at risk for depression, anxiety, and suicide. Parents who offer support, understanding of development, and independence within boundaries balanced with taking responsibility for actions ensure that a teen moves forward in their development.

Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills, Confidence, and Develop Habits

- Use *"I'd love to hear..."* like: *"I imagine that part of you wants to lie right now, so I'd love to hear how you take responsibility for this so we can both learn."*
- Follow up when your teen makes mistakes helping them repair harm. If they know there are action steps they can take to make things better after a poor choice, they are far less likely to feel the need for lying.
- Find small opportunities to help your teen mend relationships.
- Proactively remind. So often parents have a sense of when a teen is tempted to lie. Just before they do, you may whisper in your their ear, *"Remember to tell the truth even when you make mistakes and then, we'll figure out the rest together."*

Tip The best way to turnaround a misbehavior is by recognizing when and how your teen makes good choices and acts positively in similar circumstances. Teens need to learn what to do as well as what not to do.

Tip Discuss characters in stories. Courage to be true to self is a universal theme that is used in literature time and again. Find these heroes, particularly those who are flawed. Point out their faults, and then learn together how they triumph. Be sure to discuss how the conquering hero has to make choices that do not align with what others want.

Step 4. **Support** Your Teen's Development and Success

- Ask key questions: *"How do you feel about making that decision?"* or *"What does your heart or inner voice tell you?"* or *"What are some options if you break a rule?"*
- Reflect on outcomes: *"Remember when you broke the neighbor's lawn chair? You told her you were sorry, and she said she knew it was an accident and had it repaired. It was all okay, and we appreciated your honesty."*
- Stay engaged. Ask yourself if you need to reteach or make changes.
- Engage in further practice. Role play or rehearse when needed.
- Follow through on logical consequences to repair trust when needed.

Step 5. **Recognize** Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Notice even small successes: *“I notice you told me when you forgot your laptop at school. I appreciate you telling me.”*
- Recognize small steps along the way.
- Build celebrations into your routine. Encourage opportunities for fun and further connection.

Tip Be specific. “Good job” seems not to carry much meaning. However, a specific compliment about a pointed behavior - *“You admitted when you were wrong, and I know how hard that can be!”* - can promote more of the same.

Trap Avoid gifts or other physical rewards or performance. These actually have a de-motivating effect on teens. When you remove the money, for example, have they internalized the skills and also the sense of responsibility for performing them? There’s less of a chance if you’ve offered a “bribe.” Focus on your attention as the best reward. Your attention and recognition add to their feelings of competence. This is an essential strategy in discipline for skill building.

Celebrate yourself for making it your parenting priority to work on cultivating the social and emotional skills that are most critical for your teen’s success today and in their future!

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