



Lying Summary

Why Lying?

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

Tip These steps are done best when you and your child/teen are not tired or in a rush.

Tip Intentional communication and a healthy parenting relationship support these steps.

Step 1. Get Your Child/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 Children/teens don’t want to be in the spotlight, and questions can feel like an interrogation. So, look for comfortable windows of opportunity to introduce the questions. For example, is your child/teen telling you about a friend who lied to their parents? Or, are you watching someone lie on a reality television show together? Those are ideal moments to move into these kinds of conversations.

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

- Model honesty. Modeling honesty could be sharing aloud what you are 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 child/teen to take a breath before answering a question. This gives your child/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.
- Help set your child/teen up for success by asking the right questions. Instead of *“Did you do this?”* ask, *“Tell me what happened?”*

- Talk with your child/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 feel you need to lie to me.”*
- Catch your child/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 appreciate you being honest.”*
- Talk about trust and how it is built slowly but can be broken quickly.
- Learn about moral development (see full tool for stages).
- Teach positive behaviors when you identify misbehaviors. Consider: “What positive behavior can I teach my child/teen to replace what I’ve told them not to do?”
- 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.

Trap Children/Teens who fear punishment when they misbehave are prone to lie to cover up their mistakes. Part of your modeling as parents requires learning more about how to teach responsibility and self-discipline through alternative strategies.

Trap Children/Teens who are left alone frequently and whose needs are neglected often turn to lying to find attention, take unhealthy risks, and meet their needs in ways that can be self-destructive and potentially destructive of others.

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

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

- Use “I’d love to hear...” statements 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 child/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 child/teen mend relationships.
- Recognize effort by saying “I notice...” like, *“I notice you told me you broke the plate even though you were worried about how I would react -- I appreciate your honesty!”*
- Focus on the logical consequences of dishonesty.
- Discuss characters in stories. Courage to be true to self is a universal theme that comes up in literature time and again.
- Proactively remind. Often parents have a sense of when a child/teen is tempted to lie. Just before they do, you may whisper in 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 turn around a misbehavior that may be taking place is by recognizing when and how your child/teen makes good choices and acts positively in similar circumstances. They need to learn what to do as well as what not to do.

Step 4. **Support** Your Child's/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 forgot to take the dog for a walk? You said you were sorry and immediately took the dog out. 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. Create more opportunities to practice when all is calm.
- Follow through on logical consequences to repair trust when needed.

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

- Notice even small successes. *"I noticed 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.

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2020). *Lying Summary. Ages 11-14*. Retrieved from <https://www.ParentingMontana.org>.