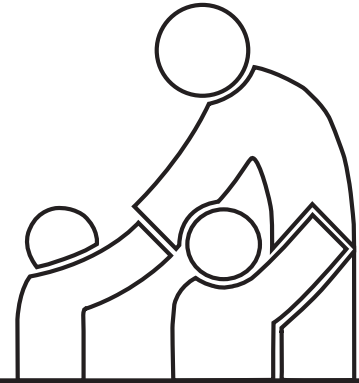


# Family Times

## NEWSLETTER



A NEWSLETTER FOR ADULTS WITH CHILDREN AGES 5-8

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### Honesty Is the Best Policy

In today's world, honesty often seems to be a thing of the past. As parents, we may insist that our children be honest with us; yet it is amazing how often we lie to them. Adult examples and how we deal with our children's fibs are important.

### Lies We Tell Children

Perhaps the word "lie" seems a bit strong for the statements we make to young children. But if we say something that is false as if it were true, then we are, indeed, lying. Often we aren't aware of the casual, "little" lies that seem harmless.

These lies may create problems for children, and when they see through them, children begin to accept dishonesty as a way of life.

*The Teasing Lie* – "If you swallow that watermelon seed it will sprout in your tummy." "Your face will freeze that way." We may find such statements amusing, but for some children they are a source of fear and worry. These children may be afraid to ask if these things are really true, partly because they fear their worst suspicions will be confirmed and partly because they fear being ridiculed. This casual teasing may have a much deeper effect than we suspect.

*The Ultimatum* – "If you don't come right now, I'll leave the mall without you." This kind of lie may have undesirable effects regardless of whether children believe it. Many children, even by 4 years of age, know that the parent does not mean the threat and will not act upon it. For these children, the threat will not work.

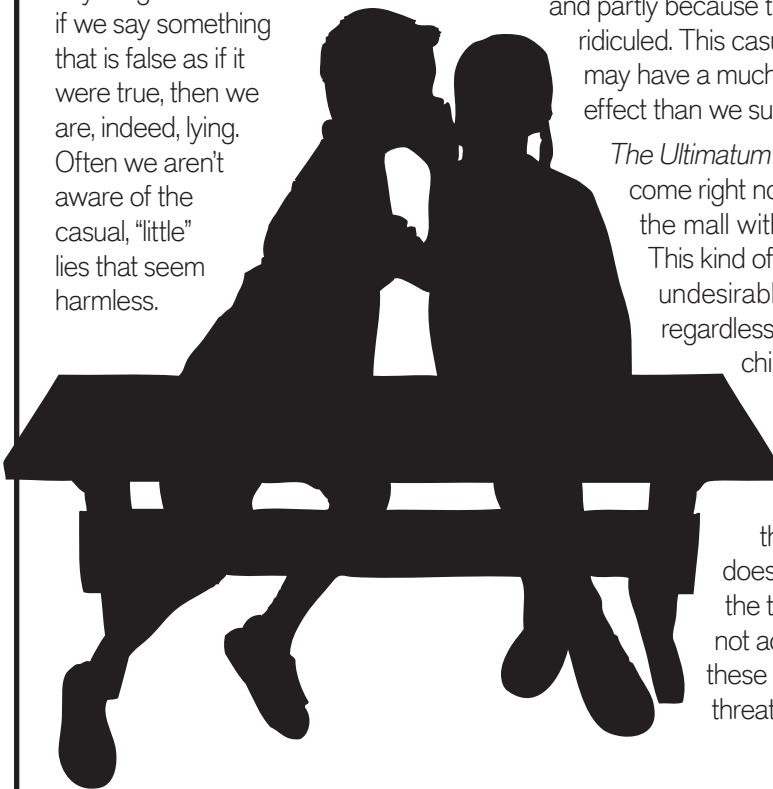
Some children always have some doubt, an underlying insecurity, or fear of being abandoned. For them, the threat may be effective, but it will cause them worry and uncertainty. Because the possible risks are high, it is best not to use this kind of threat.

*The Bribing Lie* – Statements like "If you sit still in church, I'll buy you an ice cream cone" often turn out to be lies. Sometimes this happens because "being good" or "sitting still" may mean different things to the adult and to the child. How "still" is still enough to get the ice cream? Unless the standard is clear and the parent remembers to follow through with the reward when (and only when) it is earned, the child will view this as a lie.

It seems better to make the behavior demands just because the behavior is expected and valued. Firm, clear, and serious statements usually work as long as they are consistent and not above the child's abilities. Saying "I expect you to sit still in church, even though I know it is very hard to do" will work with most children.

*The White Lie* – White lies may have two possible functions:

1. to protect the child's feelings or self-respect, and
2. to lessen the likelihood a child will worry or panic.



The white lie, told to protect a child's self-esteem, may at times seem necessary or desirable. But adults often underestimate children's capability to realize their own abilities. Often, adults lose their credibility when they flatter young children with these lies.

White lies told to lessen panic may be necessary in rare cases when a child must remain calm for safety or health reasons.

## Honesty by Example

Children very quickly pick up on adult lies. If we truly value honesty in our children, we need to refrain from lies ourselves. Children hear us when we lie to callers so a spouse doesn't have to come to the phone. They notice when we graciously welcome a visitor and then make negative remarks after the visitor is gone.

Our dishonesty bewilders children and leaves them with the feeling that it's probably all right for them to lie as long as they don't get caught, because, after all, Mom and Dad do it, too.

## To Make a Difference

- Take a walk with your child today and talk about the importance of being honest.
- If your child does lie, don't overreact. If lying doesn't work, the child will soon stop.
- Praise your child for telling the truth.
- Model correct behavior – be truthful yourself.



## The Book Nook

*The Boy Who Cried Wolf*

by Tony Ross is a good book to read with your child.

## Understanding Truth and Lies

The concepts of lying and telling the truth are still beyond a 2-year-old child's comprehension. Older children, however, begin to develop an understanding of those concepts. Whatever the child's age, we need to work to understand the reasons for the lie.

*Telling a Good Story* – Children sometimes lie and embellish, add, or detract in a creative way, to make their side of the story appear better. In fact, fabrication is a normal part of childhood, as pretending and reality come together for the maturing child. Children often use fabrication as a way to lead you into something more important. They are merely "testing the waters."

We say, "Tell me the truth and you won't get in trouble." But, how often does that work out for the kids? Recognize that there may be times when a child may be describing something to test your mood. Take time to listen to what he is saying.

*Trapped* – "Did you hit your sister?" "Did you make this mess?" Be careful asking questions that back a child into a corner. Naturally, your child wants to avoid any punishment or difficulty. During the first five years of life, children go through a normal phase of trying to cover up by lying. They stop lying when they learn it doesn't convince anyone. Excessive lying may be due to harsh punishment, frequent punishment, trying to please adults with high expectations, or a parent's preoccupation with lying.

**The Rule:** "Don't lie. Tell me the truth."

**Discipline:** Punish a child based on the available evidence. Don't ask your child what happened if it is obvious. Children aren't good at testifying against themselves. If there is no evidence, overlook the event. When you confront your child about misbehavior and she spontaneously denies it, show your disapproval. Say, "I really feel bad when you lie to me. I hope you will tell the truth the next time." Discuss with your child what discipline is needed when he or she lies. Don't try to catch your child in a lie or make him confess.

This issue was written by Martha Garton, WVU Grant County Extension Agent.

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