



HOW TO HANDLE LYING

The age between three and five is often when an imaginary friend plays in the backyard and an imaginary hippopotamus lives under the bed. During this stage of rapid development, a young child's imagination serves a vital function. Play and imagination are necessary in growth and development and are the beginning of learning boundaries and asserting one's autonomy. One area that a child begins to

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explore at this age is the meaning of lying. Telling tall tales and untruths is developmentally normal at this age. All four-year olds lie. An active imagination is emotionally healthy at this age. Children often tell tall tales about imaginary friends as well as lie to deny wrongdoing or to avoid punishment for disobedience. How a parent handles the lying will help develop the child's inner conscience that will determine patterns throughout childhood and adolescence. Parents reactions based on memories of how they were treated or punished for such acts often complicate the problem.

- Try to understand the circumstances that led to the lying; try to understand the reasons- fantasy, or fear of what will happen if the child tells the truth.
- Don't corner the child or overreact to the situation. A four-year old is just beginning to develop a conscience. Too severe a punishment can cause the child to lie even more to avoid future punishment, cause the development of a conscience that is rigid and fearful, or instill fierce rebellion and make matters worse.
- Apologize to the child when you do overreact or are too severe in your consequences or discipline. Explain to the child how much lying concerns you and assure him that you are more concerned with the truth than the actual offense.

- Fantasy friends are the child's form of day dreaming; a way to conquer fears and deal with the unknown in the world. They are the result of a creative mind.

When you and your child can discuss each situation as it occurs and you can help him understand his own reasons for not telling the truth, you can be certain that you are making progress in this area.

On the subject of tall tale telling, you might respond to your child by saying, "I know that you are pretending when you tell me that story." When the lie is to avoid getting into trouble for a specific act and you feel strongly that your child should confess the misdeed, you may make it easier by saying something like "this vase is broken, I wonder what happened?" If the child continues to lie over and over again, he is probably feeling too much pressure to conform.

Vase?
What vase?

At this point it is wise for parents to back off and evaluate their own reactions to the lying. Help a young child understand why truth matters. Rather than focusing on the lying, tell your child the story of "The Boy Who Cried Wolf." After telling the story, point out that if you can't tell the difference between what is true and what is false, you might not know when something really important is happening. Let children know that you only care about their telling the truth because you care about them and want them to be safe and happy.

Help a young child understand why truth matters.

Ideas for this handout were taken from T.Barry Brazelton's Touchpoints, and Penelope Leach's Your Baby and Child

