

The 'Not Me!' Syndrome - Childhood Lies

by Sabrina Tang

Lying is like a tool children use to avoid punishment, and in some cases, to reinforce a poor self-image. Children who refuse to 'own up' to naughtiness are not deliberate liars. We explain why children exhibit the 'not me!' syndrome, and advise how parents can help remedy it.



As parents, we all want our children to be responsible, happy and honest. But inevitably, we all must deal to some extent with our children's dishonest behaviour along the way.

With very young children, mistruths can be the result of a difficulty in distinguishing what is real and what is imagined.

As our children grow, they become more likely to innocently tell anti-social lies, those deliberate falsehoods that are often attempts to deny or cover up previous misbehaviour.

It is these types of lies that must be dealt with quickly and firmly, as this behaviour can become habitual and problematic in terms of your child's relationships with friends and family.

What Triggers A Lying Habit?

Most children do not understand the concept of truth and lie, but as they grow older and learn that lying is dishonest, they often choose to tell a lie anyway for a number of reasons.

Comments Ms. Geraldine Tan Twang Ling, a Psychologist at the Centre for Effective Living. "Youngsters lie from time to time because they may feel that they had let down their parents, or those who mean a lot to them. So naively, they think by that by denying the action, it will be able to rectify the situation."

In addition, sometimes children will witness parents or other role models lie without apparent consequences, thus the lying behaviour is copied.

Other children who have been branded 'liars' for past behaviour, consider lying as a part of their self image. Other reasons include:

- Self Defence – children lie to escape punishment;
- Ego Boosting – children lie or exaggerate to make themselves look good; and
- Hostility – children lie to get back at, or even with a friend or sibling.

If your child does admit to doing something wrong, positively acknowledge the fact that he or she told the truth, and deal with the situation itself.

By understanding why our children lie at various times, makes it easier to understand what we should do about it.

Getting behind the deceitful words and into the minds of these little ones, will help us prevent such occurrences by anticipating and reasoning against this behaviour.

Ways To Raise A Truthful Child

• Model Truth

Avoid lying in the presence of your children, because children become easily influenced. If your child sees your life littered with little white lies, she learns that this is an acceptable way to avoid consequences.

• Accept Your Child

Convince your child that you respect her actions and choices. The child who knows her acceptance in the family is not conditional upon her performance is less motivated to lie.

• Don't Label Your Child 'Liar'

Avoid judgmental name-calling, as children often use parental labels to define themselves, significantly lowering their self-esteem. To them, a bad label is better than no label at all. It's better to say something like, "This isn't like you", or "You are usually honest with me".

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• If Your Child Lies

Always correct your child for lying, and do not let her think she's getting away with it. Confront her and let her know you are disappointed. A child with a conscience will punish herself by feeling remorseful.

• Encourage Honesty

Every chance you get, talk about how important 'the truth' is. Tell your child that honest people are well respected by others, and name a few examples. Children will easily get inspired if these people are role-models.

• Express Oneself

Encourage your child to be honest about her feelings at all times. For instance, if you take her toy away because she was throwing it around, ask her if she is angry. Assure your child it's OK to feel such way and that she can be honest about it.

• Reward The Truth

If your child does admit to doing something wrong, positively acknowledge the fact that she told the truth and deal with the situation itself. If you respond to her with anger, she may not tell the truth the next time. ☑

