

Children – Cheating

Why do some children pick up the cheating habit?

Firstly, children of all ages tend to want to do well in order to please their parents. Before they attend school, most of them learn to respond to their parents in the manner that invokes the most positive response. It could range for repeating what their parents want them to say or sing a song for them, or show them the most recent thing that they have learnt.

These preschoolers then enter school and are exposed to a whole new realm of data. They have to quickly learn how to adapt to the new environment and not lose what they have learnt socially in the first 3 years. They quickly learnt that in a meritocratic environment obtaining good grades would invoke the same positive response from their parents than knowing how to sing or paint beautifully. They would possibly then try to write words beautifully, spell or read or even do their additions and subtractions.

However, different children learn at different paces and they start to rely on their old method of learning which is mirroring. When they are young, mirroring is a good method to learn but as they grow older, mirroring becomes copying. Some children may have picked up the method from some of the television shows or cartoons that they have watched. They may think it is funny or cute even though it is a wrong behaviour.

How can this behaviour influence children as they grow older?

When children first start to copy, they do not know that it is wrong. However, they are quickly taught in school that they should do their own work. They are chided if they copy someone else's work. The child that is chided now knows that the behaviour is wrong. The rest of the children, having seen the chiding, also learn that they should not do such a thing and others should not do that to them. They learn to cover their work. The behaviour of cheating becomes more wrong.

However, if the child is slower than the rest, he may try to resort to means as he would want to still obtain positive response from his parents. Moreover, academic results become increasingly more important as they grow older. The methods of cheating may also become more sophisticated as they grow older. Some may resort to it if they feel desperate and if they are rewarded enough such as having good grades through cheating.

They may become increasingly aware that they are doing the wrong thing. However, they may have no resources to help them to catch up with their peers or they have not had any help to deal with the reason that they copy in the first place. More often than not, we tell the children not to copy before the test but we hardly stop to ask the child what difficulties they are facing. Instead, the child who has committed the offence is blacklisted by teachers, parents and even their own peers.

Sometimes, some children cheat as it is the only way they are able to obtain attention from friends or teachers. There are some cases of children who would cheat to get parents to call their school. When asked what the motivation for cheating is, the child would say, "If I haven't done it, my parents would never know that I am alive". These tend to happen with older children. Parents are encouraged to communicate with their children frequently to understand their feelings, thoughts and behaviours without jumping too quickly to conclusions.

Should you have any concerns or inquiries, The Therapy Room is here to help. With a team of experienced psychologists, led by Geraldine Tan, the principal psychologist, The Therapy Room conducts parenting programmes and workshops. For more information, please click [here](#) for the programmes. In addition, The Therapy Room also conduct therapeutic interventions for people across the lifespan. Please feel free to click [here](#) to contact us and find out more.

How can parents guide a child who has innocently cheated?

There are a few things parents can do. However, it is encouraged for parents to first find out the reasons behind why the child is cheating. Parents can ask the child if he or she is having difficulties with school work. If it is, the parents can alert the teacher about it and work on the problems together with the child and the school. Parents can offer their help to their child if he or she does not understand a certain part of their work. It is important to remember not to blame the child but instead explain to the child in clear term that the behaviour is wrong and should not be repeated. Parents are encouraged to reassure the child that even though he was not able to do the piece of work, it did not lessen the love the parent have for him or her.

If the teacher is the one who discover the cheating and it is the first time the child has done it, the teacher can take the child to one side and inquire if the child has not comprehended what is being taught. If the child is unable to confide in the teacher, it should be highlighted to the parents. It should not be highlighted as an offense but as a situation that needs to be looked into with gentleness. It is important for parents and teachers to work together and observe if the child displays this behaviour in all the subjects or only in a particular one.

If the cheating is due to the desire for attention from parents or friends, it should be dealt with accordingly. In any situation, the wrong behaviour needs to be punished but finding out the reason behind the action is vital to extinguishing the behaviour.

At The Therapy Room, our team of psychologists, led by Geraldine Tan, the principal psychologist, has numerous experiences working with children. Should you have any concerns or inquiries, please feel free to click [here](#) to contact us and find out more.