

Parenting – The “Not me” Syndrome!

Why do preschoolers refuse to own up to misbehaviours or mistakes?

Often, when parents realise that their child has told a lie, most of them would reprimand the child and tell them it is wrong. Consequently, the parents may be alarmed that their children can lie so easily.

It is not uncommon for parents to face situations such as when a child did badly in school for tests and decided to lie about the mark or lie that the paper has not been returned. However, instead of reprimanding immediately and jumping to conclusion, parents are encouraged to try and understand the child's motives behind the behaviour. Parents can then handle the situation in a constructive and supportive way.

Many children who are caught lying do not do it deliberately or planned to lie, even though they may appear to be. If they were, most parents will most likely not be able to catch them. If we draw a parallel to why an adult tells a “white lies” and why children lie, we can see that it is often an emotional or social reason that caused us to do so. Below are some of the reasons listed. It is important to acknowledge that children who refuse to own up are not always malicious and naughty.

- Guilt / Fear

If a child gets into an accident, he/she would feel scared. Most children would know that he/she is in the wrong and would want to try and escape the consequences. This could be because he/she may feel that he/she has let down his/her parents or a person that means a lot to him/her and he/she thinks that by denying the action it would be able to rectify the situation.

- Attention

When a child wants attention, he/she would try and do certain things that may not be approved of. When he/she is found out, he/she is happy of the attention, regardless that it is negative. However, since the basic need of a child is to be approved and loved, he would try to push the responsibility away.

- Testing the boundaries

Most children will have a tendency to test the boundaries as it is part of their growing stages. They learn what they are able to get away with and what may result in being caught. If they are caught they would do a number of things. They may try and deny or push away responsibility. As a child grows older, he will want to test the limits of his surroundings. He would first start from his family when he is a child. When he is in the teenage years, he will move to testing the societal limits. When he misbehaves, he actually knows that it is wrong and knows the consequences. However, he/she would test to see how far he can go without being caught. When he is caught he will still try to avoid the responsibility as he does not want to bear the consequences. Children and teenagers that do so should be corrected immediately. Other than correcting them,

parents are encouraged to communicate with their children and understand their views too.

Parents are also encouraged to be careful of what they say. Children are extremely clever and they are at the stage where they pick up whatever they hear and learn. Parents can avoid lying in the presence of the children because they may pick them up. The child may learn that lying is an acceptable way to avoid consequences.

In a nutshell, being vigilant about the child's motivation and use behind the behaviour and what the adults say in front of children are essential in helping the child process his feelings and finding appropriate alternatives. As such, it will discourage the use of white lies.

At The Therapy Room, a team of psychologists, led by Geraldine Tan, the principal psychologist, is experienced in working with children and teenagers of diverse backgrounds. Should you have any concerns or inquiries, please feel free to click [here](#) to contact us and find out more.

How can parents guide children to be brave and honest?

When a child denies his/her responsibilities, parents are encouraged to find out the thoughts and feelings behind this action. Below are the reasons they may be denying their responsibilities and what parents can do for each of the reason.

- Guilt / Fear

If the child had an accident, it is strongly encouraged for parents to control their emotions and not fly into a rage. By being angry, it will confirm the child's fears or accentuate his/her guilt. Instead, parents can calmly let the child know that they are upset or disappointed with his actions but they are not rejecting him. In the case that a child has such feelings and thoughts, parents are encouraged to be glad that the child has a conscience and teach him/her to deal with his conscience in the appropriate manner.

Parents can encourage him to own up and when he does, praise him/her for being brave to do so. Parents can explain that every action has a consequence and administer the punishment. It can be sweeping up the broken glass when he breaks a vase or if when he wets his bed, he can change the bedsheet. Once again, it is encouraged for parents to praise their child on owning up and performing his/her punishment.

If the child keeps denying and pushing away the responsibility, parents can double the punishment. After that, it is important for parents to explain to the child why he is punished twice – one for the denial and pushing of responsibility and two, the consequence of his accident – and why he is punished in the first place.

- Attention

If the child is trying to obtain the parents' attention and does something wrong purposefully, parents can punish the child first. Afterward, parents can sit the child down to speak with him. Parents are encouraged to be as honest and open to the child as possible as the child would learn from the parent to communicate his needs openly and honestly in the future. It is also important for parents to find out from the child what he was feeling and thinking that prompted him to act in a manner that he did.

- Testing the boundaries

If a child is young, they should be taught that in every situation that there are rules and regulations to follow. There would also be consequences if they overstep the boundaries. Parents have to be consistent with the administration of the limits. If the child realises that they are able to push the limits once they would try again. Parents have to be cautious with the messages that they are sending the child if they are conflicting messages. However, this is part of growing up and it is essential as part of survival in society. So unless it is a constant occurrence, parents should not be overly concerned.

In addition, parents can try some of the ways listed below to raise a child to be honest and brave.

- Model truth

Avoid lying in the presence of the child because children are easily influenced. If the child sees that the adult tells a lot of white lies, he learns that lying is an acceptable way to avoid consequences.

- Accept your child

Parents can convince the child that they respect his actions and choices. The child who knows his acceptance in the family is not conditional upon her performance is less motivated to lie.

- Don't label the child liar

Avoid judgemental name-calling as children often use parental labels to define themselves, significantly lowering their self-esteem. To many of the children, a bad label is better than no label at all. Instead, it is encouraged for parents to say something like "this isn't like you" or "you are usually honest with me".

- If your child lies

Always correct the child for lying and do not let him think that he will get away with it. Parents are encouraged to confront the child and let him know that they are disappointed. A child with conscience will punish himself by feeling remorseful.

- Encourage honesty

Parents are encouraged to talk about how important the truth is as often as they can when they are able to communicate with their children. Parents can tell their children that honest people are well respected and name a few examples. Most children will be easily inspired if these people are role models.

- Express oneself

Parents can encourage their children to be more honest about her feelings at all time. For instance, if you take his toy away because he was throwing it around, ask him if he is angry. Assure your child it is okay to feel such way and that he can be honest with it.

- Reward the truth

If the child does admit to something wrong, positively acknowledge the fact that he told the truth and deal with the situation itself. If the parents respond to him with anger, he may not tell the truth next time.

However, if you are still concern, The Therapy Room is here to help. At The Therapy Room, a team of psychologists, led by Geraldine Tan, the principal psychologist, is experienced in working with children and teenagers of diverse backgrounds. Should you have any concerns or inquiries, please feel free to click [here](#) to contact us and find out more.