

# To tell the truth: kids' edition

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(HealthDay)—Teaching kids about telling the truth is a critical life lesson. And your approach can determine how motivated your kids are to be honest.

Younger children are more likely to tell the [truth](#) because they want to please you; older ones understand that it's the right thing to do.

Older kids also are less motivated by the threat of getting punished, according to a study published in the *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*. In fact, threats can have the opposite effect, making children less likely to tell the truth because they fear the punishment.

A child's behavior often depends on his or her age. Kids under 6 may not grasp the concept of lying. But children over 6 typically know the difference, and know when they're being deceitful.

Try to understand what might prompt kids to fib. They may be under pressure—and fail—to meet overwhelming demands, such as high achievement in school or sports. Or they might be trying to save face and avoid disappointing you after they behaved in a way they've been taught is wrong. See if the circumstances that prompted the lying need to be changed.

How you deal with a lie matters. Carrying out threats doesn't seem to help with future honesty. Rather, explain why truthfulness between parents and children is key to a good relationship and that they'll be in far less trouble if they tell the truth when there's a problem.

Be aware that if a child hears you telling "white lies" or stretching the truth yourself, you're sending him or her a mixed message and could undermine your lesson in honesty.

**More information:** HealthyChildren.org, a service of the American Academy of Pediatrics, has a section for parents on [why a child lies](#) and how to handle it.

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