

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: Our son is a good boy, but lately, we have caught him lying several times. There doesn't seem to be much of a reason because the situations aren't that important. What's going on, and what can we do?

ANSWER: Lying is as old as Satan (the "father of lies") in the Garden. Deception and hiding were Adam and Eve's way of handling their choice to disobey. Most children at least "experiment" with lying for a time. If the "experiment" becomes too successful, the behavior can become habitual.

It is important that lying is confronted firmly, calmly, and immediately so that there is little opportunity and incentive to adopt the behavior permanently. Your mood must be one of sadness, not anger. **If your mood is one of anger, your child will at some level dismiss you and determine that his lying is necessary and justified.** He will learn to be more sophisticated and adept at lying. Your anger will derail your son's learning.

All behaviors have a function. Remember, the heart of a child has three basic needs: **love, security, and purpose.** The function of lying in most school-age children is to obtain a measure of **security** in the following areas: (1) to avoid punishment (2) to acquire some type of advantage over someone else (3) to demean or attack someone else (4) to gain and experience a sense of power (5) to cope with the painful realities or perceived realities of life (6) to protect their friends. You will have to look at the situations to determine which or what combination of the above reasons is true for your son.

What can you do?

1. Pray fervently for the **wisdom, awareness, and love** you will need to beat this thing before he becomes a teenager. This is an opportunity for God to transform you as well as your son.
2. **Model honesty** in all your dealings. No "white lies" or withholding of truth. Keep your promises. Don't exaggerate.

3. Avoid punishments that are too severe and degrading, or your son will continue to lie even if it only gets him out of *some* punishments. For many children, the immediacy of the moment (avoid the punishment now) often supercedes the long-term effects (when the lie is discovered, it will be worse). Instead of punishing him, ask him: **“What are you going to do to fix this... to make it better?”** Have some ideas if he is clueless. Making restitution helps solidify learning through affective/emotional experience... the most effective mode in learning.

4. Affirm and enjoy the good he does. Make certain there are enough “good times” and loving praise that your son has the strength and security in your relationship to handle the times of discipline. This affirmation must be intentional and requires time. Spend most of your energy on him when things are going well!

5. Foster a **relationship of acceptance and forgiveness** no matter what. In doing so you are modeling the character of God. Experiencing how you interact with him, should make it easier for him to have a faith relationship with God.

6. Show your son that telling the truth mitigates the punishment (e.g. our legal system).

7. Let your son know that when he tells the truth, you will do all you can to help him rectify the situation. Again, “What will you do to fix this? I will help you.” (What a great opportunity to build the relationship!)

8. When there is a provable, blatant cover-up, your son should be accountable for both the event and the lie (in a mood of sorrow, not anger). “How will you fix **both the event and the cover-up?**” Young kids need ideas. You can supply them, but let him think for a while first. He might come up with some great ideas himself... all the better!

9. Don't go out of your way to *create* opportunities for him to lie. Instead of asking questions such as: “Have you been a good boy in school?” Do **your** homework, call his teacher to verify, and then say: “Your teacher informs me that you have not been a good boy. This

really makes me sad for you. How can I help you do better? How can you fix this?”

This a heartbreaking time for parents, but God can turn the situation into opportunities for growth and good.

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