







HOW TO DEAL WITH LYING IN TEENS

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DOES YOUR TEEN LIE TO YOU?

Research has found that almost all adolescents lie. Some common topics teens lie to their parents about are drinking, drug use, what music they listen to, how they spend their time with friends, whether a party is being supervised, what they spend their allowance on, completing their homework, whether they are dating or not, the clothes they wear when out of the home, the movie they're seeing, and who they spend time with.

The chances are your teenager has told you lie at some point. It is inevitable that from time to time all teens will be less than honest with their parents. Let's be honest, how many of us can say we never told a lie (or in the case of the writer, multiple lies) to our parents?



teenagers who are drinking alcohol, taking drugs, having sex or skipping school are very likely to lie to their parents about it.

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WHY DOES YOUR TEEN LIE TO YOU?

No one likes being lied to. From frustration to betrayal, confusion to curiosity, the sense that your teenager is lying to you can evoke a whole range of responses. Here are the top reasons your teen lies to you:

1. AVOID GETTING IN TROUBLE

Fear of punishment is the most basic driver for lying for people of any age. If your teenager knows they have done something wrong and they want to avoid the consequences one option for them is to lie. Sometimes this will be a calculated and elaborate process, other times they will be put on the spot and lie in an instant.

While common to all ages, lying to avoid getting into trouble is greatly influenced by the parent-child relationship. If you have a good relationship with your child and discipline is firm but fair your teen will be less likely to lie. If, however, the relationship is poor and there is a history of unfair or overly harsh punishment the likelihood of lying increases dramatically.

2. PREVENT DISAPPOINTMENT

Many teens lie because they believe they are protecting their parents. They either don't want their parents to be concerned or they want to avoid disappointing them. Even though it may not feel like it, most teenagers value their parent's opinion and their approval above all. Not wanting to let parents down can be a bigger motivation to lie than avoiding punishment. Lets face it, punishment is over once you have done your time, but losing your parents respect or trust can take a lot longer to get back. This is why it is important to treat lying as a relationship issue not a behavioral problem that will be fixed through discipline.

3. SOCIAL PRESSURE

One of the most significant shifts that occur during adolescence is the move from a family centred world to a peer centred world. It is hard to overstate the importance of peer groups to a teenager. Their social standing amongst peers is a valuable and treasured asset.

Most teenagers understand the risks associated with lying to parents, but they do so anyway because the risk posed to their friendship is greater. Lying to parents can be a way to fit in with peers simply because they won't be left out of activities, such as parties or staying out late. It can also promote social standing; having the courage and cunning to deceive and manipulate parents is a way to earn respect and admiration from others.

4. POOR COMMUNICATION

Teenagers will lie when they don't believe parents will respect their point of view. Feeling like parents don't listen or try to understand is a common reason for teenage lying. Establishing and nurturing healthy communication patterns with your teenagers will keep the incidences of lying to a minimum.

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5. EXERCISE CONTROL

Having a sense of control is important for teenagers' developing a sense of autonomy. Adolescents can exercise this control by not telling parents everything that is going on; they don't lie they just don't volunteer information. Teens need to feel they are able to handle life by themselves. Telling parents or other adults about what the issues they deal with is an admission they are unable to manage life by themselves.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT LYING

1. OPEN COMMUNICATION

Your teen's degree of honesty may reflect your ability to communicate openly with your teen. Honest conversations between parents and teenagers aren't always easy, and will sometimes cover ground that can make both parties uncomfortable. What if your teenager wants to tell you that he drinks at parties? Could you handle it if your daughter told you she wants to go on birth control? How much honesty can you tolerate?

Be a safe haven, a welcoming receptacle for everything. This does not mean you have to agree with everything your child tells you but if you can't tolerate your teen's honesty you will facilitate their need to lie.

2. MODEL HONESTY

Author Robert Fulghum once said "Don't worry that children never listen to you. Worry that they are always watching you." Adults lie. Usually these are white lies intended to protect someone's feelings. Kids grow up watching parents lie and learn that lying prevents conflict while telling the truth can upset people. By the time kids become teenagers telling lies to keep the peace or avoid trouble has become second nature. This can pose a challenge for parents. Start paying attention to your white lies and ask yourself if they necessary. Often, lies are lazy attempts to reduce the need to explain ourselves or needlessly embellish. If your child is older, you can ask them if there is an honest way to solve a problem and have them give you input. If you do lie, let your teen know if you experience guilt and disappointment.

3. NEGOTIATE

Being proactive about negotiating rules and boundaries with your teenager is one of the most effective ways to reduce dishonesty. There will be times when there is no room for compromise. But if there is *never* any room for negotiation, teenagers believe there is no point asking or negotiating and they will remove upfront communication as a valid option and resort to deception and lying.

4. AVOID TRAPPING

Parents seem to love trapping their kids in a lie. If you want your teenager to be upfront and admit when they make mistakes then you need to be upfront when confronting them about a mistake. Don't play games, don't try to trap them, it's sneaky and disrespectful.

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5. AVOID INTERROGATIONS

When it comes to getting the truth out of your teenager, angry interrogations are rarely the most effective method. While it is perfectly normal to get angry when you realize your teenager is lying to you, don't use your teenager as a means of getting your anger out. If you yell and become furious you will just increase the likelihood that your teen will become more stubborn, more secretive, and more prone to deception. Take a break and discuss things when you have calmed down.

6. BE CAREFUL WITH CONSEQUENCES

The way parents respond to dishonesty can either encourage or discourage how truthful their teenager is in the future. If punishment is out of proportion to the offence then a teenager will be more likely to lie about similar events in the future. Overly strict parenting or excessively harsh punishments might act as deterrents to certain offences in the short term but they do little to prevent lying or long term benefits. Fairness promotes honesty. Be willing to negotiate.

7. AVOID LABELS

Calling your child a liar at any age or at any time does nothing to help the problem.

8. PAY ATTENTION

You can learn a lot about what is happening in a teenagers life by the lies they tell. Exploring with your teenager the reasons they lie can open up new insights into what is happening in your teen's life, and what is happening in your relationship with them. Dealing with the reasons behind the lies instead of just the lying is a more effective way to promote honesty and reduce lying.

IF YOU CATCH YOUR CHILD IN A LIE...

If you catch your child in a significant lie, try not react in the moment. When you do talk, don't argue with your child about the lie. Just state what you saw, and what is obvious.

For example, "I saw footprints outside your window again. Last time that happened you snuck out. You were falling asleep at the kitchen table this morning at breakfast. But you told us that you were home all night." Then say, "There's going to be a consequence for that. You're not going to be able to stay over at your friend's house next weekend. And we're worried about where you went."

Now, leave the door open for her to tell you what happened and potential negotiation. Remember, do it without arguing, just say it matter-of-factly. "We have this information, we believe it to be true and these are the consequences."

Sources:

When a Teenager Can't be Trusted by Lisa Belkin, New York Times; Why Kids Lie and What to Do About It by James Lehman; Eight Ways Parents can Reduce Teenage Lying by Chris Hudson