

Lying Age 12 Summary

Why Lying?

Whether it's your eleven-year-old lying about eating the lunch you packed them for school, your twelve-year-old lying about failing a test, or your fourteen-year-old telling you a friend's parents are home supervising them when they aren't, your child's/teen's ability to tell the truth can become a regular challenge if you don't create plans and strategies.

STEP

1



GET INPUT

Get Your Child/Teen Thinking by Getting Their Input

- Ask questions and listen carefully to your child's/teen's responses since they will shape how you talk about lying and honesty. Questions you could ask include:
 - *"Who do you trust and why?"*
 - *"What's important to you about honesty?"*
 - *"Have you ever been lied to? How did it feel?"*
 - *"When are you tempted to lie?"*
 - *"What's the worst thing that could happen if you tell the truth about a misbehavior?"*

Tip: Children/Teens don't want to be in the spotlight, and questions can feel like an interrogation. So, look for comfortable windows of opportunity to introduce the questions. For example, is your child/teen telling you about a friend who lied to her parents? Or are you watching someone lie on a reality television show together? Those are ideal moments to move into these kinds of conversations.

STEP

2



TEACH

Teach New Skills

- Model honesty. Modeling honesty could be sharing aloud what you are thinking when expressing how you feel since this is an area where adults tend not to share their honest feelings fully. For example, you could share the opposite of the truth first and then share what the truth for you is. This shows your child/teen the contrast and makes your own internal debate apparent. For example, *"I am tempted to say that I feel just fine in response to your 'How are you?' But, the truth is that I am upset about a conversation I had at work, and I can't seem to get it off my mind."*

- Teach your child/teen to take a breath before answering a question. This will give your child/teen a moment to allow their thinking brain to catch up with their reactive/emotional brain and allow them the opportunity to share a more honest response.
- Ask the right questions to help your child/teen succeed. Instead of “*Did you do this?*” ask, “*Tell me what happened.*”
- Catch your child/teen telling you the truth, particularly when difficult for them. You can say, “*I know it was hard to tell me the truth, and I appreciate your honesty.*”
- Talk about trust and how it is built slowly but can be broken quickly. Help your child/teen understand that lies today lead to a lack of trust that will significantly impact them tomorrow. For example, if you can’t trust their word about whose house they are going to today, you will not trust them about where they are going when they are older.
- Take time to examine how you feel when your child/teen lies. Many parents value honesty and may worry that lies in childhood will equate to dishonest characteristics in their child/teen. While it is important to teach honesty, it is essential to remember that it is developmentally appropriate for a child/teen to lie if they are concerned about a negative consequence. A calm approach will help your child/teen do the brave work of learning honestly, even when it is hard.
- Teach positive behaviors when you identify misbehaviors. Children/Teens are most tempted to lie when they make a poor choice or mistake. With that knowledge, each time your child/teen breaks a rule, consider the question: “What positive behavior can I teach my child/teen to replace what I’ve told them not to do?”
- At a family meal, share a personal story about how trust between family members has been critical in a safety or other important situation. Talk about how you come up with alternative solutions when tempted to lie.

Trap: Children/Teens who fear punishment when misbehaving are prone to lie to cover up their mistakes. Part of your modeling as parents requires learning more about how to teach responsibility and self-discipline through alternative strategies.

Trap: Children/Teens who are left alone frequently and whose needs are neglected often turn to lying to find attention, take unhealthy risks, and meet their needs in ways that can be self-destructive and potentially destructive to others.

STEP
3



Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Use “I’d love to hear...” statements. You may want to offer your child/teen practice in truth-telling when it’s tempting to lie. When you notice misbehavior, before your child/teen can attempt to cover it up, you might say, “*I imagine that part of you wants to lie right now, so I’d love to hear how you take responsibility for this so we can both learn.*”

- Follow up when your child/teen makes mistakes, helping them repair harm. If they know there are action steps they can take to make things better after a poor choice, they are far less likely to feel the need to lie.
- Find small opportunities to help your child/teen mend relationships. Siblings offer a regular chance to practice this! If there's fighting, talk to your child/teen about how they feel first. When you've identified that they had a role in causing harm, brainstorm together how they might make their sibling feel better. You might ask, *"What could you do?"* Allow your child/teen to supply answers. Support and guide them in following through on selecting one and doing it. Your follow-through will help your child/teen follow through while internalizing a critical lesson.
- Recognize effort. Frequently, children/teens get feedback on what they are not doing right, but how often do you recognize when they are working on their behaviors? Recognize effort by saying "I notice..." like, *"I notice you told me you broke the plate even though you were worried about how I would react—I appreciate your honesty!"*
- Focus on the logical consequences of dishonesty. If your child/teen lies about taking an extra piece of candy, talk about it and, better yet, show the logical consequences. For example, if they lie about taking a piece of candy, the logical consequence could be that they do not get any more sugary treats for the day.
- Discuss characters in stories. Courage to be true to self is a universal theme that comes up in literature time and again. Find these heroes, particularly those who are flawed and human. Point out their faults and frailties and then learn together how they triumph. Be sure to discuss how the conquering hero has to make choices that do not align with what others want.
- Proactively remind. Often, parents have a sense of when a child/teen is tempted to lie. Just before they do, you may whisper in their ear, *"Remember to tell the truth even when you make mistakes, and then we'll figure out the rest together."*

Tip: The best way to turn around misbehavior is to recognize when and how your child/teen makes good choices and acts positively in similar circumstances. They need to learn what to do and what not to do.

STEP
4



Support Your Child's/Teen's Development and Success

- Ask key questions before jumping to responses or decisions for action. Parents and those in a parenting role are often in a position where they have to direct their child's/teen's actions, but jumping in and directing their actions can become the default if you are not careful. Look for chances to ask questions before stepping in with directives. Good questions promote thinking and help children/teens internalize the evaluative process of responsible decision-making—thinking through the action to the consequence before they act.
 - *"How do you feel about making that decision?"*
 - *"What does your heart or inner voice tell you?"*
 - *"What are some options if you break a rule?"*

- Learn about development. Each new age and stage will present different social challenges. Being informed about what developmental milestones your child/teen is working toward will offer you empathy and patience.
- Reflect on outcomes and past experiences with honesty. For example, *“Remember when you forgot to take the dog for a walk? You said you were sorry and immediately took the dog out. It was all okay, and we appreciated your honesty.”*
- Stay engaged. Working together on ways to respond to mistakes and poor choices can help offer additional support and motivation for your child/teen when challenging issues arise.

| | |
|--|----------------------------|
| STEP 5  RECOGNIZE | <h2>Recognize Efforts</h2> |
|--|----------------------------|

- Recognize and call out when things are going well. It may seem obvious, but it's easy not to notice when everything is moving along smoothly. Noticing and naming the behavior provides the necessary reinforcement that you see and value your child's/teen's choice.
- Recognize small steps along the way. Don't wait for significant accomplishments—like the full bedtime routine going smoothly—to recognize effort. Remember that your recognition can work as a tool to promote more positive behaviors. Find small ways your child/teen is making an effort and let them know you see them.

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2024). *Lying Age 12 Summary*. Retrieved from <https://www.ToolsforYourChildsSuccess.org>

This content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Tools for Your Child's Success communities, financial supporters, contributors, SAMHSA, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

© 2024 Center for Health and Safety Culture at Montana State University