

Lying Age 18 Summary

Why Lying?

Whether it's your fifteen-year-old lying about where they went after school or your seventeen-year-old lying about failing a test, your 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 Teen Thinking by Getting Their Input

- Ask questions and listen carefully to your 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?"*
 - *"How do you feel when you get away with a lie? How do you feel when you get caught in a lie?"*
 - *"What's the worst thing that could happen if you tell the truth about a misbehavior?"*

Trap: 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 teen telling you about a friend who lied to their 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 teen the contrast and makes your 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 teen to take a breath before answering. This will give your teen a moment to allow their thinking brain to catch up with their reactive/emotional brain and allow them to share a more honest response.
- Ask the right questions to help your teen succeed. Instead of “*Did you do this?*” ask, “*Tell me what happened.*”
- Ask your teen about the lie they just told. You might say, “*What happened just now that made you lie to me?*”
- Catch your teen telling you the truth, especially when it is difficult. 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 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 what they did after school, you will not trust them about whose party they are going to later.
- Take time to examine how you feel when your teen lies. Many parents highly value honesty and may worry that lying in adolescence will equate to a dishonest characteristic in their teens. While it is important to teach honesty, it is also important to keep in mind that it is developmentally appropriate for a teen to lie if they are concerned about a negative consequence. A calm approach will help your teen do the brave work of learning honestly, even when it is hard.
- Teach positive behaviors when you identify misbehaviors. Teens are most tempted to lie when they make a poor choice or mistake. With that knowledge, each time your teen breaks a rule, consider the question: “What positive behavior can I teach my 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: Teens who fear punishment when misbehaving are prone to lie to cover up their mistakes. Part of modeling as parents requires learning more about how to teach responsibility and self-discipline through alternative strategies.

Trap: 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 see/hear...” statements. You may want to offer your teen practice in truth-telling when it’s tempting to lie. When you notice misbehavior, before your teen can attempt to cover it up, you might say, “*I imagine that there’s a part of you that is worried about getting into trouble, so I would love to see you take a risk and try truthfully telling me what happened.*”

- Recognize effort. Frequently, 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...” statements like, *“I notice how you told me when you went to the movies with your friends instead of staying at your friend’s house. I appreciate your honesty!”*
- Focus on the logical consequences of dishonesty. Show them the logical consequences if your teen lies about where they are. You may need help trusting what they are saying. This may translate to you saying “no” the next time they ask to go out. Or it may mean they will be escorted next time.
- 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 teen is tempted to lie. Before they do, you may whisper in your teen’s 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 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 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 teen’s actions, but jumping in and directing your teen’s 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 teens internalize the evaluative process of responsible decision-making – thinking through the action to the consequence sequence before they act.
 - *“How do you feel about the decision you made?”*
 - *“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 teen is working toward will offer you empathy and patience.
- Reflect on outcomes. *“Remember when you broke the neighbor’s lawn chair? You told her you were sorry; she said she knew it was an accident and had it repaired. 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 teen when challenging issues arise.

STEP
5



Recognize Efforts

- 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 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 teen is making an effort and let them know you see them.

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2024). *Lying Age 18 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