

## Lying Age 7 Summary

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### Why Lying?

Whether your five-year-old lies about eating their dinner when you can clearly see they have been stashing peas in their napkin, your seven-year-old telling their teacher they did their homework but left it at home when they didn't, or your ten-year-old telling a friend they dance ballet when they've never tried it, your child's ability to tell the truth can become a regular challenge if you don't create plans and strategies.

STEP

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GET INPUT

#### Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their Input

- Ask questions and listen carefully to your child'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?"
  - "When are you tempted to lie?"
  - "What's the worst thing that could happen if you tell the truth about a misbehavior?"

STEP

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TEACH

#### Teach New Skills

- Model honesty. Modeling honesty could be sharing aloud what you think when you say how you feel. For example, you could share the opposite of the truth first and then what the truth is for you. This shows your child 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 child to take a breath before answering a question. This will give your child 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 child succeed. Instead of "Did you do this?" ask, "Tell me what happened."
- Catch your child 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 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 whether they got their homework done, you may not trust them about where they are going when they are older.
- Take time to examine how you feel when your child lies. Many parents highly value honesty and may worry that lies in childhood will equate to a dishonest characteristic in their child. While it is important to teach honesty, it is essential also to remember that it is developmentally appropriate for children to lie if they are concerned about a negative consequence. A calm approach will help your child do the brave work of learning honestly, even when it is hard.

**Tip:** If your child is between ages five and eight, they are likely in the selfish stage of moral development. If your child is nine or ten, reflect on whether they remain in the selfish stage or have begun moving on to the social phase.

**Tip:** Play the game Two Truths and a Lie, where a person offers three simple statements, one of which is a lie, to see if the other can guess which one is false. Learn first together about body language signals that reveal a lie.

**Trap:** Children 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.

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## Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Use “Show me...” statements with a positive tone and body language to express excitement and curiosity. You may want to offer your child practice in truth-telling when it's tempting to lie. When you notice a misbehavior, before your child can attempt to cover it up, you might say, “*Show how you can tell me about a mistake you made. Mistakes are part of learning.*”
- Follow up when your child makes mistakes to help 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 mend relationships. Siblings offer a regular chance to practice this! If there's fighting, talk to your child 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 to supply answers; you may be surprised at how many options they generate. Support and guide them in following through on selecting one and doing it. Your follow-through will help your child follow through while internalizing a critical lesson.

- Recognize effort. Frequently, children 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 how you told me when you broke the vase. I appreciate your honesty!”*
- Focus on the logical consequences of dishonesty. If your child lies about taking an extra piece of candy, talk about it and, better yet, show the logical consequences to them. For example, if they lie about taking candy, they might not get any more sugary treats for the rest of 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 is tempted to lie. Before they do, you may whisper in your child’s ear, *“Remember, we tell the truth even when we make mistakes, and then we’ll figure out the rest together.”*

**Tip:** The best way to turn around misbehavior that may be taking place is by recognizing when and how your child makes good choices and acts positively in similar circumstances. Children need to learn what to do and what not to do.

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## Support Your Child’s Development and Success

- Ask key questions before jumping to a response or a decision for action. Parents and those in a parenting role are often in a position where they have to direct their child’s actions, but jumping in and directing your child’s actions can become the default if you are not careful. Look for chances to ask questions before stepping in with directives. Open-ended questions promote thinking and help your child internalize the evaluative process of responsible decision-making – thinking through the action to the consequence sequence 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 is working toward will offer you empathy and patience.
- Reflect on outcomes and past experiences with honesty. For example, *“Remember when you broke your Grandma’s glasses? You told her you were sorry, and she said she knew it was an accident and had them repaired. It was all okay, and we appreciate 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 when challenging issues arise.

- Engage in further practice. Create more opportunities to practice when all is calm.

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**RECOGNIZE**

## 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 child'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 is making an effort and let them know you see them.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, after getting through your bedtime routine, snuggle and read before bed. Or, in the morning, once ready for school, take a few minutes to listen to music together.

**Trap:** It can be easy to resort to bribes when recognition and occasional rewards are underutilized. If parents or those in a parenting role frequently resort to bribes, it is likely time to revisit the five-step process.

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