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Listening, learning, and living together: it's the science of life.

Facts on Children's Lying: What Every Parent Needs to Know¹

Kate Fogarty²

Everyone remembers the story of Pinocchio, the little wooden boy, and his "conscience," Jiminy Cricket. Of course, Pinocchio had a problem with lying, as every time he did, his nose would grow. As parents, we don't have the benefit of such evidence when our children lie.

In a recent study of over one thousand kindergarteners followed over three years, teachers reported that 71% to 83% of children do not lie. Mothers, however, showed less trust in their children, as only 33% to 37% reported that their children lie rarely. Teachers did agree with mothers in one area: that boys were more likely than girls to lie frequently (Gervais et al., 2000).

Some children will lie only on occasion in tempting situations, and research findings support that occasional lying among children is normal. However, some children will lie frequently, usually in a given setting, such as school. The problem with frequent lying in children, as stated by experts, is that over time, with experience and cognitive developmental gains, they perfect their skills of deception with adults (Gervais et al., 2000; Stott, 2005).

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The researchers reported that children perceived to lie regularly at age 7 were also likely to lie consistently at age 8, and children who lied on a continual basis were more likely to act disruptively at home and at school. So, parents: you need not panic if you catch your child in an occasional lie, but children's lying on a constant basis is cause for concern and calls for intervention.

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