

## JACK'S CORNER

**QUESTION:** Our son is a good boy, but lately, we have caught him lying a number of times. There doesn't seem to be much of reason because the situations aren't that important. What's going on, and what can we do?

**ANSWER:** Lying is as old as Satan (the "father of lies") in the Garden. Deception and hiding were Adam and Eve's way of handling their choice to disobey. Most children at least experiment with lying for a time. If the "experiment" becomes too successful, the behavior can become habitual. It is important that lying is confronted firmly, calmly, and immediately so that there is little opportunity and incentive to adopt the behavior permanently. Your mood must be one of sadness, not anger. **If your mood is one of anger, your child will at some level dismiss you and determine that his lying is necessary and justified.** He will learn to be more sophisticated and adept at lying.

**All behaviors have a function.** Remember, the heart of a child has three basic needs: **Love, Security, and Purpose.** The function of lying in most school-age children is to obtain a measure of **security** in the following areas: (1) to avoid punishment (2) to acquire some type of advantage over someone else (3) to demean or attack someone else (4) to gain and experience a sense of power (5) to cope with the painful realities or perceived realities of life (6) to protect their friends. You will have to look at the situations to determine which or what combination of the above reasons is true for your son.

What can you do?

1. Pray fervently for the wisdom, awareness and love you will need to beat this thing before he becomes a teenager. This is an opportunity for God to transform you as well as your son.
2. Model honesty in all your dealings. No "white lies" or withholding of truth. Keep your promises. Don't over exaggerate.
3. Avoid punishments that are too severe and degrading, or your son will continue to lie even if it only gets him out of some punishments. For many children, the immediacy of the moment (avoid the punishment now) often supercedes the long-term effects (when the lie is discovered, it will be worse).
4. Affirm and enjoy the good he does. Make certain there are enough "good times" and loving praise that your son has the strength and security in your relationship to handle the times of discipline. This is work and requires time.
5. Foster a relationship of acceptance and forgiveness no matter what. In doing so you are modeling the character of God. Experiencing you should make it easier for him to have a faith relationship with God.
6. Show your son that telling the truth mitigates the punishment (e.g. our legal system).
7. Let your son know that when he tells the truth, you will do all you can to help him rectify the situation. (What a great opportunity to build the relationship!)
8. When there is a provable, blatant cover-up, your son should be punished for both the event and the lie (in a mood of sorrow, not anger).

9. Don't go out of your way to create opportunities for him to lie. Instead of asking questions such as: "Have you been turning in your homework?" Do YOUR homework, call his teacher, and say: "Your teacher informs me that you have not been doing your homework. This really concerns me. How can I help you do better?"

This a heartbreaking time for parents, but God can turn the situation into opportunities for growth and good.

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