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Children more likely to become adults that lie when they grow up hearing falsehoods

Even well-intentioned lies can have negative consequences



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Honesty is always the best policy; this old adage is at the heart of a recent study conducted by researchers from Nanyang Technological University in Singapore that explored the effects of parents lying to their kids.

The study revealed that people are more likely to become liars when they grow up if parents make a habit out of lying to them when they're kids.

"Parenting by lying can seem to save time especially when the real reasons behind why parents want children to do something is complicated to explain," [said](https://media.ntu.edu.sg/NewsReleases/Pages/newsdetail.aspx?news=05752f3b-61a0-4102-8919-47940b01c15b) (https://media.ntu.edu.sg/NewsReleases/Pages/newsdetail.aspx?news=05752f3b-61a0-4102-8919-47940b01c15b) researcher Setoh Peipei. "When parents tell children that 'honesty is the best policy,' but display dishonesty by lying, such behaviour can send conflicting messages to their children. Parents' dishonesty may eventually erode trust and promote dishonesty in children."

The effects of lying

To see how lying affects kids into adulthood, the researchers had nearly 400 young adults complete questionnaires that required them to recall memories from their childhoods and report on how honest they remember their parents being.

The researchers found that children who are lied to by their parents grow up to be less honest. Children who reported that their parents frequently lied were quicker to anger and were more likely to engage in riskier behaviors than those who didn't experience frequent falsehoods during their childhoods. The findings emphasize how far-reaching the effects of lying can be, especially when heard during the formative years.

Moreover, the participants who recall being lied to as children were also more likely to deliver their own lies to their parents as adults. The researchers want to continue to do more research in this area to see how the parents' objectives when lying can affect these outcomes.

"It is possible that a lie to assert the parents' power, such as saying 'If you don't behave, we will throw you into the ocean to feed the fish,' may be more related to children's adjustment difficulties as adults, compared to lies that target children's compliance, e.g. 'there is no more candy in the house,'" said Peipei.

"Our research suggests that parenting by lying is a practice that has negative consequences for children when they grow up. Parents should be aware of these potential downstream implications and consider alternatives to lying, such as acknowledging children's feelings, giving information so children know what to expect, offering choices, and problem-solving together, to elicit good behavior."