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Mahilig Magsinungaling? Study Says Telling Kids White Lies May Harm Them In Adulthood

Can a little white lie really affect kids in the future?

by **Kitty Elicay** · 16 hours ago

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How many times have you told a [white lie](#) to your kids? “Lowbatt na ang iPad,” or “Of course, Santa is real!” Parenting is a tough job, so if it prevents a tantrum or calms your toddler down, a small lie can’t hurt right?

Well, a [new study](#) might make you re-think that strategy. According to researchers at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore, **children who are told lies by their parents may have more trouble adjusting to adulthood.** Not only that, but they may be more likely to lie to their parents once they are older, and also more likely to engage in negative behavior.

Researchers asked 379 young Singaporean adults to answer three questionnaires: the first asked participants to recall if their parents told them lies related to eating, leaving or staying, children’s misbehavior, and spending money. For example, “I did not bring any money with me today, we can come back another day.”

The second questionnaire asked them to indicate how frequently as adults they lied to their parents, and the kind of lie they often tell. (Examples include lying about their activities, lies that benefit others, or exaggerations about events). Lastly, they were asked to fill out a questionnaire that measured their self-reported psychosocial maladjustment and tendency to behave selfishly and impulsively.

Those who reported being lied to more as children were more likely to report lying to their parents as adults. Researchers also found that as adults, they would often have difficulty adjusting to social and psychological challenges. These difficulties include disruptiveness, conduct problems, the experience of guilt and shame, as well as selfish and manipulative character.

“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. When parents tell children that ‘honesty is the best policy’ but display dishonesty by lying, such behavior can send conflicting messages to their children.” shares the study’s lead author, Assistant Professor **Setoh Peipei**, who from NTU’s School of Social Sciences.

He adds, “Parents’ dishonesty may eventually erode trust and promote dishonesty in children.”

Before you panic and start counting down all the white lies you’ve ever told your child (and checking whether you’ve done any real damage), the researchers make a distinction about the kind of lie parents tell their kids. Most of the time, the lies had negative associations — for example, “If you don’t come with me now, I will leave you here by yourself.” Parents also seemed to lie to assert their power over the child, saying for example, “If you don’t behave, we will throw you into the ocean to feed the fish.”

While a little white lie told with positive intent may not be as harmful, the study shows that parents still need to be mindful about what they tell their kids because their words matter.

“Our research suggests that parenting by lying is a practice that has negative consequences for children when they grow up,” explains Assistant Prof. Peipei. “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 from children.”