

Honesty really is the best policy! Lying to your children that they did well during a school play can turn them into liars later in life, study finds

- Researchers say that lying to your children can turn them into liars later in life
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By [SHIVALI BEST FOR MAILONLINE](#) 

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Whether it's the **Christmas** Nativity or an amateur production of *Cats*, most parents have had to endure their fair share of school plays.

If your child participated, it's likely you told them they were amazing - regardless of their performance.

But a new study suggests that this could actually be detrimental.

Researchers from Nanyang Technological University say that lying to your children can turn them into liars later in life.

'The bad news for parents is that sometimes, honesty may be the best policy,' said Peipei Setoh, lead author of the study.



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Whether it's the Christmas Nativity or an amateur production of *Cats*, most parents have had to endure their fair share of school plays (stock image)

Most parents are guilty of telling their children a lie or two.

However, until now, the impacts of these lies have been largely unexplored.

In their study, the team enlisted the help of 564 children aged 11 to 12 years old, as well as their parents.

The participants were surveyed about their use of two different types of lie - instrumental lies and white lies.

Instrumental lies are lies told for child compliance, such as 'Finish all your food, or you'll grow up to be short!'

Meanwhile, white lies are those told to instil positive emotions, such as 'You were great in that school play!'

The surveys revealed that parents used instrumental lies more often than white lies, and the children reported greater belief in instrumental lies than in white lies.

'Instrumental lies are used to get a child to comply when they are misbehaving, for example, a parent threatening to call the police if the child is being naughty,' Ms Setoh said.

HOW TO CATCH A LIAR

1. **Focus on the detail given when someone is storytelling.** Can they give a rich description? Do they seem emotional?
2. **Stick to one good cue.** Researchers found that participants were able to spot lies more easily when examining one attribute rather than a handful.
3. **Don't always stick to eye contact signals.** Details were said to be an easy indicator of honesty.



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However, children exposed to these types of lies were significantly more likely to lie to their parents.

Meanwhile, white lies usually come from a good place, but can also turn your child into a liar.

However, this only they case if they realise what you've told them isn't true.

'White lies may be motivated by good intentions, but if children realise they have been lied to, this can also lead to lying from the child,' Ms Setoh added.

The researchers hope the findings will encourage parents to think twice before lying to their children.

'Our findings underscore the value of differentiating parental lies by type in investigating its role in children's socialization of lying as well as the importance of considering children's perceptions and interpretation of parental lies,' the team wrote in their study, published in the **Journal of Experimental Child Psychology**.

WHAT ARE THE NINE WAYS TO SPOT A LIAR?

The big pause: Lying is quite a complex process for the body and brain to deal with. First your brain produces the truth which it then has to suppress before inventing the lie and the performance of that lie.

This often leads to a longer pause than normal before answering, plus a verbal stalling technique like 'Why do you ask that?' rather than a direct and open response.

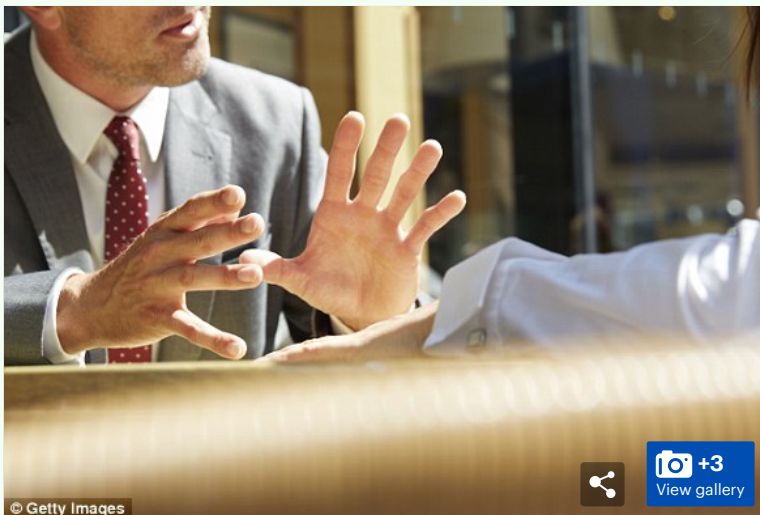
The eye dart: Humans have more eye expressions than any other animal and our eyes can give away if we're trying to hide something.

When we look up to our left to think we're often accessing recalled memory, but when our eyes roll up to our right we can be thinking more creatively. Also,

The lost breath: Bending the truth causes an instant stress response in most people, meaning the fight or flight mechanisms are activated.

The mouth dries, the body sweats more, the pulse rate quickens and the rhythm of the breathing changes to shorter, shallower breaths that can often be both seen and heard.

Overcompensating: A liar will often over-perform, both speaking and gesticulating too much in a bid to be more convincing. These over the top body language rituals can involve too much eye contact (often without blinking!) and over-emphatic gesticulation.



The more someone gesticulates, the more likely it is they might be fibbing (stock image)

The poker face: Although some people prefer to employ the poker face, many assume less is more and almost shut down in terms of movement and eye contact when they're being economical with the truth.

The face hide: When someone tells a lie they often suffer a strong desire to hide their face from their audience. This can lead to a partial cut-off gesture like the well-know nose touch or mouth-cover.

Self-comfort touches: The stress and discomfort of lying often produces gestures that are aimed at comforting the liar, such as rocking, hair-stroking, twiddling or playing with wedding rings. We all tend to use self-comfort gestures but this will increase dramatically when someone is fibbing.

Micro-gestures: These are very small gestures or facial expressions that can flash across the face so quickly they are difficult to see. Experts will often film footage that is then slowed down to pick up on the true body language response emerging in the middle of the performed lie.

The best time to spot these in real life is to look for the facial expression that occurs after the liar has finished speaking. The mouth might skew or the eyes roll in an instant give-away.

Heckling hands: The hardest body parts to act with are the hands or feet and liars often struggle to keep them on-message while they lie.

