

Lying to Your Children Might Make Them Liars, Parents Warned

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By [Pandora Dewan](#)

Science Reporter

Have you ever lied to your kids? Maybe you've told them about the tooth fairy or hidden vegetables in their spaghetti bolognese. But, unfortunately, scientists have found that the more we lie to our children, the more they are likely to lie to us.

Roughly 84 percent of American parents say they have lied to their kids to control their behavior or encourage compliance, according to research in the *International Journal of Psychology*. But according to new research, this lying—no matter how innocent—may actually be distorting our child's moral compass.

In a study published in the *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, researchers in Singapore analyzed 564 parents and their children (aged between 11 and 12 years) to find out how parental lies can influence their child's behavior.



A stock photo shows a mother talking to her young son. Telling lies to your child, no matter how innocent, could make them more likely to lie to you, according to new research. **JUPITERIMAGES/GETTY**

"We focused on pre-adolescents (i.e. 11 and 12 years of age), a period when children's concepts of lying become more sophisticated, with notable implications for their adjustment," the researchers write.

The study looked at two types of lies: instrumental lies and 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," the study's principal author, Peipei Setoh at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University, said in a statement.

White lies, meanwhile, are told to instill positive emotions. Things like "that was beautiful piano playing" even when the child's piano playing was, in fact, terrible.

In their study, the researchers assessed parental use of these different lying strategies, as well as the children's belief in their parents' lies and their own lying behavior. "This is the first study to examine the unique contributions of different types of parental lies in conjunction with children's belief in parental lies to understand their implications for children's lying," the researchers write.

They found that children were more likely to believe instrumental lies compared with white lies. And when they realized they were being lied to, children were more likely to lie back to their parents as a result.

"White lies may be motivated by good intentions, but if children realize they have been lied to, this can also lead to lying from the child," Setoh said.

Exposure to instrumental lies, meanwhile, was associated with an increase in lying behavior among children, regardless of whether they believed their parents' lies.

"The bad news for parents is that sometimes, honesty may be the best policy," Setoh said.