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TRUTH SERUM Telling your kids white lies to spare their feelings could backfire, experts warn

Experts suggest there are three ways you can help manage lying in children as a parent

- [Joe Davies](#)
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LYING to you children could turn them into fibbers, a study shows.

If your child knows they're being lied to — even a white lie — they're more likely to tell porkies themselves, [Singaporean](#) researchers found.



Happy young Caucasian mother and teen daughter sit relax on sofa talking sharing secrets. Smiling mom or nanny and teenage girl child rest on couch speak enjoy family weekend bonding at home.Credit: Getty

They tracked behaviour in 564 children aged 11 to 12 to see how their relationship with the truth differed depending on their parents.

Dr Setoh Pei Pei, of Nanyang Technological University, said: “The bad news for parents is that sometimes, honesty may be the best policy.

“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.”

Previous studies have shown [children are more likely to lie](#) if their parents lie around them more generally.

The latest study, published in Elsevier’s [Journal of Experimental Child Psychology](#), looked at how [lies told by parents to influence their children’s behaviour](#) impacted their honesty.

Lies were split into two groups: instrumental and white lies.

Instrumental lies are ones used by parents to get them to change what they are doing, for example saying they have no money if a child is begging for new toys.

White lies were classed as ones used to improve how children are feeling emotionally, for example by saying their piano playing is “beautiful” when it is actually terrible.

Researchers surveyed 564 children and parents, 95 per cent of which were mothers.

They asked how often parents said or children heard phrases that were linked with instrumental or white lying.

Children were also asked how often they lied to their parents, and parents how often they were lied to.

Instrumental lying from parents was significantly linked to lying in children, while white lies were linked if the children knew they were being lied to.

Dr Pei Pei said: "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.

"However, instrumental lying makes it more likely that children will lie to their parents."

Three ways to manage your child's lying

It's common for children to experiment with not telling the truth, here are three ways as a parent, you can respond to this:

1. Don't panic

Respond calmly.

Try to avoid lectures as negative attention can encourage defensiveness and more lying.

2. Speak to your child in a positive way

Try and point out the truth in a way that does not make your

child feel defensive.

E.g. "that's interesting that you think that because I read..."

3. Understand the reason behind the lie

Sometime children lie to feel better about themselves.

Instead of responding with frustration, use it as an opportunity to help build their self-esteem.

Source: [The Centre for Parent & Child Support](#) ■