



# When Your Child Lies



## THE CHALLENGE

Your five-year-old son is playing in the next room.\* Suddenly, you hear a crash. You run to your son, and you find him standing next to a shattered porcelain vase. The guilty look on his face tells you everything.

“Did you break that vase?” you ask your son sternly.

“No, Mommy, I didn’t!” he quickly replies.

This is not the first time you have caught your five-year-old in an obvious lie. Should you be worried?

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\* For simplicity, we refer to the child in this article as a boy. However, the principles discussed apply to both genders.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

**All lying is bad.** The Bible says that Jehovah God disapproves of “a lying tongue.” (Proverbs 6:16, 17) The Law given to Israel imposed strict sanctions on anyone who deceived another person.—Leviticus 19:11, 12.

**But not all lying is equal.** Some lies are malicious; they are told to harm another person. Other lies are uttered under the pressure of the moment, perhaps to avoid embarrassment or punishment. (Genesis 18:12-15) While all lying is wrong, some lies are more serious than others. If your child told a lie, consider his age and his reason for hiding the truth.

**You should address the problem while your child is still young.** “Telling the truth, especially when it’s hard, is an important lesson for children,” writes Dr. David Walsh. “Relationships are based on trust, and lying will break that trust.”\*

**Do not panic, however.** The fact that your child has lied does not mean that he is on a fast track to moral corruption. Remember, the Bible says: “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child.” (Proverbs 22:15; footnote) Some children manifest such foolishness by lying, perhaps thinking that it is an easy way to avoid punishment. How you respond, then, is important.

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\* From the book *No: Why Kids—of All Ages—Need to Hear It and Ways Parents Can Say It*.



## WHAT YOU CAN DO

**Try to discern why your child is lying.** Does he fear punishment? Does he not want to disappoint you? If your child spins stories to impress his friends, is it because he is not old enough to understand the difference between reality and fantasy? If you know why your child is lying, you will be better able to correct him.—*Bible principle: 1 Corinthians 13:11.*

**At times, use statements instead of questions.** In the scenario described at the outset, the mother, who already knew the facts, sternly asked her son: “*Did you break that vase?*” The child lied, perhaps fearing Mom’s wrath. But instead of asking an accusatory question, suppose that the mother had simply stated: “Oh, no, you broke the vase!” By using a statement rather than a question, she does not tempt the child to lie—and she helps him build a pattern of honesty.—*Bible principle: Colossians 3:9.*

**Praise honesty.** Children naturally desire to please their parents, so use that inclination to your advantage. Let your child know that honesty is an important family value and that you therefore expect him to be truthful.—*Bible principle: Hebrews 13:18.*

Make clear to your child that lying destroys trust and that it can take a long time to rebuild trust once it is broken. Reinforce good behavior by praising him when he tells the truth. For example, you could say, “It makes me happy that you are honest.”

**Set the example.** Obviously, you cannot expect your child to be truthful if he hears *you* say such things as “Tell him I’m not home” when you do not want to speak to someone on the phone or “I’m staying home sick today” when you really just want to relax.—*Bible principle: James 3:17.*

**Use the Bible.** Its principles and true-life accounts promote honesty. The book *Learn From the Great Teacher*, published by Jehovah’s Witnesses, can help you to instill Bible principles in your child. Chapter 22 is entitled “Why We Should Not Lie.” (See an excerpt from it in the box “A Book to Help Your Child.”) *Learn From the Great Teacher* is available at [www.jw.org](http://www.jw.org). ■

## KEY SCRIPTURES

“When I was a child, I used to . . . reason as a child.”—1 Corinthians 13:11.

“Do not lie to one another.”  
—Colossians 3:9.

“We wish to conduct ourselves honestly in all things.”—Hebrews 13:18.

“The wisdom from above is . . . not hypocritical.”—James 3:17.

## A BOOK TO HELP YOUR CHILD

“Even though you do not mean to, you may break something. If you’re asked about it, should you say that your brother or sister did it? Or should you pretend that you don’t know how it happened? . . . No matter what we may do, it will always make matters worse if we lie about it, and we shouldn’t even tell only half of the truth. The Bible says: ‘Speak truth.’ It also says: ‘Do not be lying to one another.’ Jehovah always speaks the truth, and he expects us to do the same.—Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9.”

Excerpt from the book *Learn From the Great Teacher*.