
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Lying to Children



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm Neil.

Rob

And I'm Rob.

Neil

Rob, when you were a child, did you have a pet?

Rob

Yes, we had a few pets. My favourite was a little fluffy hamster.

Neil

And what happened to your hamster?

Rob

Well one day I got home from school and he wasn't in his cage. I was worried for a bit in case he'd escaped or got hurt, but it was alright. My mum told me that he had gone to live on a farm so that he could run around with other animals.

Neil

Really?

Rob

Yes, really.

Neil

A hamster. Went to live on a farm. To be with other animals. Really?

Rob

Oh, well, when you put it like that.

Neil

I think that was probably one of those lies that parents tell their children so as not to make them sad.

Rob

Well I'm sad now

Neil

Well maybe having a go at this quiz will cheer you up. According to a study by a US psychologist, what percentage of people will lie in a typical ten minute conversation?

Is it:

- a) 40%
- b) 50%, or
- c) 60%?

Rob

I think most people don't lie that much, so I'll say 40%.

Neil

We'll reveal the answer a little later in the programme.

Rob

So today we are talking about lies and particularly the lies that parents tell children.

Neil

The topic was discussed on the BBC Radio 4 programme, Woman's Hour.

Rob

A guest on that programme was Doctor Chris Boyle, a psychologist at Exeter University. He talks about a particular kind of lie. We tell these lies not because we want to hurt people. What colour are these lies called?

Dr Chris Boyle

A **white lie** is just a **distortion** of the truth without **malicious intent** – as long as there's not **malicious intent** I think it's something that we do. It's almost a **societal norm** that it's become where it is acceptable that we do tell certain lies at certain times.

Neil

Dr Chris Boyle there. What colour is the kind of lie he was talking about?

Rob

A **white lie**. He says a **white lie** is just a **distortion** of the truth. **Distortion** here means a changing or **bending** of the truth. These kind of lies are OK as long as we don't tell them because we want to hurt someone.

Neil

He used the phrase **malicious intent** to talk about a bad reason for doing something, didn't he?

Rob

Yes, **intent** is the reason or purpose for doing something and **malicious** is an adjective which means cruel or nasty. So *without malicious intent* means without wanting to hurt or be cruel to someone.

Neil

He said that this kind of **white lie** was almost a **societal norm**. Can you explain what he means by that?

Rob

Yes, something that is the **norm** is something that is expected, it's regular and usual. The adjective **societal** comes from the noun society. So a **societal norm** is something that is regular and common in your culture or society.

Neil

So do you think your mum's story about the hamster and the farm was a little white lie?

Rob

Yes, I'm sure it was. She didn't do it with **malicious intent** - she didn't want to hurt me. In fact, just the opposite, she wanted to protect me.

Neil

Yes, that's one kind of **white lie** that parents tell, to protect children. There are also a couple of other reasons. One being the parent's convenience.

Rob

Yes, I remember my mum telling me on certain days, the park wasn't open. I know now that it never closed, I guess at the time she was just too busy to take me.

Neil

And then there are the cultural lies that parents tell children.

Rob

What do you mean by that?

Neil

Well first, if you have any children listening to this right now, you might want to cover their ears for a few seconds. Rob I'm talking about, for example, Father Christmas and the Tooth Fairy.

Rob

Yes, there's no **malicious intent** in telling children those stories. It is a cultural and **societal norm**.

Neil

Let's listen to Dr Chris Boyle again talking about **white lies**.

Dr Chris Boyle

A **white lie** is just a **distortion** of the truth without **malicious intent** – as long as there's not **malicious intent** I think it's something that we do. It's almost a **societal norm** that it's become where it is acceptable that we do tell certain lies at certain times.

Neil

So now back to our question at the top of the programme. I asked what percentage of people will lie in a typical ten minute conversation. Was it:

- a) 40%
- b) 50%, or
- c) 60%

What did you say Rob?

Rob

I said a) just 40%.

Neil

Well I'm afraid the answer was 60%.

Rob

Really? Goodness 60%! That's more than I expected.

Neil

Right, well before we go, let's recap the vocabulary we talked about today. The first expression was '**white lie**'. A lie we tell without meaning to hurt someone, for example when I say to you – you look nice today!

Rob

Wait, what did you say?

Neil

But that is actually a **distortion** of the truth. A changing or bending of the truth.

Rob

Mmmm. This makes me think of the next expression, '**malicious intent**'. **Intent** is the reason or purpose for doing something, and doing something with a **malicious intent** is doing it deliberately to be cruel or to hurt someone. I think you have **a malicious intent**, telling me that when you say I look nice, it's just a lie!

Neil

I'm just kidding!

Rob

That's the **norm** for you, isn't it, just kidding. A '**norm**' is the standard or 'normal' way that something is. In the clip we heard '**societal norm**' which is the accepted or 'normal' way something is done in society.

Neil

For example, telling children about Father Christmas.

Rob

Sssh! But yes you're right.

Neil

Well, sadly this isn't a lie but that's all for this programme. For more, find us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and our YouTube pages, and of course our website bbclearningenglish.com where you can find all kinds of other audio programmes, videos, and quizzes, to help you improve your English. Thanks for joining us and goodbye!

Rob

Bye.