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When you are done with the course, take the posttest. When you pass the posttest (70% or higher) and pay the course fee (\$10 per unit), you will be issued a CEU Certificate of Completion.

Enjoy!

**Course Name:** Teaching Parents How To Deal With The Behavior Of Lying

**Course Number:** B6C5-L

**CEU:** 1.0

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**Course material based on:**

### Basic Parenting 101:

THE MANUAL YOUR CHILD  
SHOULD HAVE BEEN BORN WITH

ISBN 0-9675870-6-9

*How-2 Parenting Series*

This book is available to therapists from CEUforTherapists.com at wholesale pricing.

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## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

1. You will study a solid overview of why children lie.
2. You will read real life examples of how parents deal with their child's lying behavior.
3. You will study ways to teach a complicated subject to parents who are coming to you for help with their children.
4. You will experience the power of story as a cognitive-behavioral therapeutic tool.
5. You will see ways to demystify psychotherapy for your patients.

**Tell me, I forget.**

**Show me, I remember.**

**Involve me, I understand.**

## SUGGESTED PREREQUISITE COURSES

I am assuming that the student has a solid understanding of learning theory and cognitive behavioral techniques. This course is based on and refers back to:

- B6C1 Teaching Parents About How Their Children Learn
- B6C2 Teaching Parents How To Build Their Child's Self Esteem
- B6C3 Teaching Parents About How To Use Time Out Effectively
- B6C4 Teaching Parents About Family Rules

In this course we will look at how a therapist teaches parents to deal with a complex family problem. The above course materials are available, free of charge, from CEUforTherapists.com.

The sections in red are for your information. The sections in black are how I explain the process to the parent. Please note that I use a cognitive behavioral approach.

## INTRODUCTION

Most parents assume that lying is abnormal and that children that lie are emotionally broken. The fact is that lying is a social norm with many difficult aspects for the average child to comprehend.

As a therapist, you will be called upon to deal with parental concerns about lying. At first, it is often difficult to sort out the familial norm for lying from psychopathology. Most young therapists believe that this subject is easy to sort out for the average family. But, as we will discuss, teaching parents how to deal with the behavior of lying is multifaceted and usually complicated.

So, with your permission, let's begin.

## TEACHING PARENTS HOW TO DEAL WITH THE BEHAVIOR OF LYING

### LYING IS?

For the sake of discussion, I am going to break lying down into three distinct sections:

- a. Fabrication
- b. Childhood lying
- c. Teen lying

In each section we will investigate why kids lie.

### FABRICATION

My five year old is a little fibber. He will create a whole story versus tell the truth. Even when there is nothing to be gained by it. I'm so worried that he will turn out to be an immoral person.

What some invent the rest enlarge.

Swift

Fabrication is the sign of a young child's emotional and verbal development. Many parents become extremely concerned about the fantasy life their child talks about. Rest assured that fabrication in early childhood is normal and should be encouraged. If your child says to you, "There is an elephant under my bed." Participate in the fabrication. Allow your child to develop his imagination. It is a good idea to ask your child, "Tell me more of the story."

It is twice as hard to crush a  
half truth than a full lie.  
Austin O'Mallery

If your child tries to use a fabrication as an excuse, calmly ask what part of the problem is he involved with. Focus on solving the problem, not on how your child wants to avoid his role in the problem.

If your child grows a wonderful imagination it will lead to many new and exciting things for us all. If you think about it, societal change comes from adults asking themselves, "How can I do this differently?"

If fabrication is getting out of hand, tell the story of *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*. Over a few weeks of discussion, young children learn to preface their words with, "I have a story," or "I know a tall tale", or "I want to tell you a shaggy dog story." It is important for parents to remember that separating fact from fiction is a learning process for children. Most children master this skill by age seven or eight. Also, if your child is really good at telling tall tales, encourage her to write them down. If a person does strange stuff it is a big problem, but if a person writes about fanciful strange stuff, we call them an author. I wonder what types of fanciful stories Steven King told his parents?

## **CHILDHOOD LYING**

I have tried everything to get my son to stop lying. No matter how hard I punish him he doesn't stop. What can I do? I don't want him to grow up to be a criminal.

As parents we need to deal with the reason children lie much more than the fact that they lie. Many parents are horrified when I make such a statement. One woman at a PTA meeting was indignant,

PTA mother: So, you're saying it is OK that my children lie?

Dr. Phil: No, ma'am. Do you think that I am fat?

PTA mother: No, not really, you are a little overweight ...

Dr. Phil: But, ma'am I weigh 300 pounds!

PTA mother: OK, but you wear it well.

Dr. Phil: 300 pounds. Do you know how fat that is? I haven't seen my feet since 1942.

PTA mother: You're not that fat; You have a weight problem I guess.

Dr. Phil: Honestly I don't, I have a food problem. I eat too much. I am fat because I eat too much food.

PTA mother: OK, I guess you're fat, but that's OK.

Dr. Phil: I only bring it up because in our society we do not go out of our way to hurt people's feelings. It is considered rude to call a fat person fat. But, it is the truth. I have noticed that people will protect my feelings rather than tell me the truth. Personally, I like that, but isn't it a form of lying?

Truth is always strange.  
Byron

The point here is that we all lie, children and adults. But, as parents we are so upset when our children lie that we lose track of the big picture. Lying is very difficult for children to understand. There are many types of lies. We have white lies, polite lies, and bold face lies. It is important for parents to help children understand their reason to lie. Only then will the need to lie substantially decrease.

## **TYPES OF LIES TO HELP CHILDREN COMPREHEND**

### a. Lies to get you out of trouble (fearful of punishment or rejection, feeling threatened or cornered):

Often children lie to get out of trouble or to avoid getting into more trouble. From the standpoint of the child, lying for this reason is logical. From the point of view of the parent/child relationship this leads to mistrust. It is important that parents focus on the long term nature of their relationship with their child. A parent needs to emphasize to their child that their relationship has to be based on trust and without this trust they will have to constantly second guess each other. I have pointed this out to my children by saying (more than once over the years): "If you are going to lie about such and such, I am concerned. If you are going to lie about something as small as such and such, then when you say, 'Good night daddy, I love you' to me tonight, how will I know something as big as that is the truth?" I leave this as an open ended thought. Over the next few weeks we talk about it many times when life is calmer and feelings are not raw. (This is also a common theme when we talk about, "What is a friend?")

### b. Lies to save face (fearful of disappointing others or feeling dumb):

Often children lie to keep from being judged harshly by others. This is often an issue of self esteem. As the child's self esteem grows, this type of lie will greatly diminish. A parent needs to be concerned when their child needs to make themselves look better because they are feeling unsure of how wonderful they actually are.

### c. Lies of omission (what mom and dad don't know, won't hurt them):

Many parents have a hard time with this one. Many feel it is OK if they omit part of the facts. But, it is hideous if their child lies to them by omitting part of the facts. Many parents *teach* lies of omission to catch their children in lies. For example, if the school calls and tells you that your fifteen year old skipped fifth period, some parents will ask, "So son, how was school today?" This is a verbal ambush. We are setting up our child to lie by using a lie of omission. It is much healthier for the

parent/child relationship to state what you know. (See TEACHING HONESTY in Chapter 2) “The school called and stated that you skipped fifth period, what’s up?” Honesty is learned. Anything that is learned can be taught. A wonderful teaching method is modeling (see Chapter 4).

Children omit information usually to protect themselves from punishment and to protect their parents’ feelings. If your child feels judged by you she will not expose her pain to you.

Dishonesty, cowardice and duplicity are never impulsive.

George A. Knight

## TEEN LYING

I often tell the following story to parents of teens to illustrate why teens lie:

Bobby is sixteen years old and a proud new license owner. The third time Bobby gets to take the family car out for the evening he returns home with alcohol on his breath. Mom and dad are furious and very concerned about Bobby drinking and driving. Bobby is very remorseful and embarrassed. He is surprised that he broke such an important rule.

Bobby talks this problem over with his parents on a few different occasions. He volunteers to join the school’s anti drug group. He seems to enjoy the group and brings home information about the societal problem of driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs.

When Bobby asks if he can use the car to take his girlfriend to the junior prom, his parents are concerned. The family talks openly about this concern and mom and dad give their conditional agreement. Mom and dad are adamant about no drinking at the prom. Curfew is extended until 2 AM due to the nature of the evening. As Bobby leaves for the evening, mom and dad talk about how mature he is and how proud they are of him. Mom and dad enjoy a quiet evening. At 11:00 dad, a Highway Patrol Officer has to go to bed. He has to get up at 4:30 to go to work.

At 2 AM no Bobby. At 2:15 mom starts to get worried. At 2:30 mom calls the girlfriend’s home to learn that she has been home since 12:30. At 2:45 mom wakes up dad. Dad assures mom that Bobby is fine. Mom thinks she hears a car out front.

To mom’s surprise, Bobby parked the car half in the driveway and half in her rose garden. He opens the car door and falls out. He staggers up to the front door. Mom opens the door and states with a scream, “My god, you’ve been drinking!” Bobby, obviously intoxicated, falls through the front door, landing on his knees. He carefully picks himself up and tries to straighten his neck tie. Mom again screams with horror, “You’ve been drinking!”

Bobby breathes his brewery breath all over her and announces as he wobbles, “No I haven’t. Who says I’ve been drinking!”

At this point mom goes ballistic. She races to her bedroom to confront dad, “Bobby is drunk and he says he isn’t! How stupid does he think I am. I’m not going to allow a stinking drunk to drive my car!!!”

At this point Bobby goes into the bathroom and kneels at the porcelain altar. His body rejects the poison in his stomach. As he pours himself into his bed, he thinks to himself. “Why is she yelling so loud ... God my head hurts”

Now, I ask you. What is the number one reason teenagers lie to their parents? Why do they look into your face and talk to you like you're stupid? Why did Bobby lie?

Logic is the technique by which we add conviction to truth.

Jean De La Bruyer

Teens lie to distract. If they make their problem your problem, you'll get caught up in it as your problem, and their life goes on.

Teens lie to distract. So, when you are discussing something with your teen and your blood pressure starts to boil, think, "Bingo, he is distracting me, I'm right, great! What the heck were we talking about?" Then stay focused on the issue, not on the teen lie. One mom summed it up nicely, "Dr. Phil, once I feel flustered and confused I know I'm right. I don't let him distract me. I've got his number. I just know I'm right and stick with the Must Rules!" It was music to my ears.

In the next section we will discuss how to help parents deal directly with their child's lying behavior. It is usually necessary to prep the parent to the "normal" feelings of having to deal with a dishonest child. Most parents will need support from you concerning the fact that parenting takes at least 21 years. Most parents become so upset with being lied to that they can't get past their own hurt feelings to deal with the child's problem.

I find that during every session, a parent needs to hear, "I'm impressed that you are willing to help your child with her lying problem ... most parents get so upset that they lose track of their parental responsibilities. I'm glad to see that you are not getting distracted from helping your child."

## DEALING WITH LIES

I advocate that lying should be seen as an indication that there is probably a more serious problem. It is our goal, as parents, to help our child uncover the real problem and deal with it. To this end I hope that parents write Must Rules that focus on the problem much more than the lie. At any one time we can deal with the lie, but if we do not deal with the cause for the lie, our children will not be able to avoid the root problem and the lying is most likely to continue. One major problem that occurs is that when parents only focus on the lie, the child learns to lie better, so as not to get caught. This is a disaster for the child in the long run. I wish for your children to be skilled at dealing with their problems, not skilled in covering up their problems with lies.

See, [B6C4 Teaching Parents About Family Rules](#)

Many families find the following Must Rule works well for them:

Must Rule: No lying

Consequence: (Young child) Time Out followed with support with the real problem.

(Older child) Sent to room to calm down followed up with discussion about the following question. "What is the lie distracting us from dealing with?"

Some parents and teenagers find that having the youth write an answer to this question while in their “calm down” area is very helpful. Many teens find it difficult to find the correct words when talking to adults. Writing down their thoughts helps them to master the skill of thinking through a conflict.

When you have to make a choice and don't make it, that in itself is a choice.  
William James

## POSTTEST

When you're ready, take the posttest to obtain your CEU certificate. Your test consists of 5 multiple choice or true/false questions per Continuing Education Unit (3 CEU = 15 questions).



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