

Better Parenting: Never Lie to Your Kids

By Sonia Spackman

A parenting trainer once said that perfect parenting is not a matter of keeping up with the Joneses, (whoever they are) or having perfectly groomed kids to show off to our relatives. Let's be real, parenting kids is a demanding job.

Why do you lie to your kids? Parents can make themselves into liars.

"Susie, you have to eat your dinner before you get ice cream and cake."

"Yes you may go to the ball game on Saturday if all your chores are done."

If Susie gets cake and ice cream no matter the reason or John goes to the ball game and his chores are not done you were not telling the truth. This was false, they were lies and you became a liar. Once you say something you must impose it. Each time the behavior happens the consequences need to happen.

How do I get off track? If we are real, we will admit that we make excuses for our efforts because we want to do as we please. Doing as we please in our families is what gets us off track. Hit and miss parenting produces hit and miss results with our kids.

Why do humans need order and consistency? It brings us a sense of security. When parents are inconsistent a child doesn't know what to expect because his surroundings are unpredictable and confusing. Imagine if you had a job where you could come in late and nothing happened, but sometimes you were severely reprimanded? Imagine this

same job: your boss ignored your work and then threatened you because your work wasn't done when he wanted it? Young children think in terms of right or wrong- black or white. Children are concrete thinkers they do not understand the gray areas very well and become bewildered or insecure when you don't do what you say.

Should I be a strict parent or an easy parent? Studies show that inconsistency in the home can be damaging to children because they can never feel secure in a world they do not understand. Inconsistent love and inconsistent consequences confuse the children. If a child is punished for a certain behavior every time, it makes sense to him. To get in trouble sometimes and get away with behavior other times is confusing. It would be easier for a child to adjust to a strict home, or to a parent who is easy than to go back and forth. Do not be too strict. How severe the consequence is, is less important than the **CONSISTANT** use of it. **SAY WHAT YOU MEAN, MEAN WHAT YOU SAY AND DO EXACTLY WHAT YOU SAY YOU WILL DO!**

How do I start? Remember when you start that it is "short term pain for long term gain." Decide on a short list of behaviors you want to stop or start. If the kids are old enough have a family meeting and explain the behavior you want to stop or start and the rewards or consequences. Allow the kids to help in deciding the final list. Make sure that you pay attention to their behavior, by giving rewards or consequences each time.

The rules have to stay the same if you are having a bad day or a good day. Once you have consequences for a behavior you must do it each time. Each time the behavior happens the consequence happens.

Should I give them a break once in a while? Stick to the rules! The rules and consequences need to stay the same. Let's say that your rules have been in place for over a year and you decide to make an exception and give them a break. This will be a mistake. Your child will misbehave more often looking for the next exception. "If my parents did it once, they'll do it again."

Why don't my kids listen to what I say? They do not listen because we lie to them when we do not follow through with what we say. We train our kids not to listen to us when we say things that do not happen. It destroys credibility and trust. Kids only pay attention to what we do and not to what we say. They become parent deaf.

When is it OK to negotiate consequences? NEVER! Once the rules are in place, they can only be negotiated at the family meeting. If lost stereo privileges were for arguing over the volume, you must make it stick. Do not let them talk you out of it by bargaining with you. "Mom, please, can I please, this is my favorite music, I'll lose it tomorrow." If you do this, you become a liar. You also invite begging and bargaining about consequences in the future. In other words if you negotiate now - here is what is happening: 1. You are not taking away

privileges that should be for arguing. 2. You are rewarding arguing by allowing the music. 3. You are letting your child disrespect the rule. 4. You are training her to argue in the future because there is a payoff.

What if my child thinks I am being unfair or cruel? One of the characteristics of a great parent is in the determination to do what is right and what is best for the child rather than what is most convenient for the parent. Stick to the rules, if you don't, your kids will lose respect for you. Keep the same consequences for the same behaviors on good or bad days. Let your words always be the truth. Make an issue of truth. The kids will see you as the model and put it in their hearts and minds.

What if an unexpected behavior happens that's not on our list? If your child does something that was not on your list of behaviors and consequences say: "I am unhappy, I do not want this to happen again, the consequences will be -----". Feel free to bring the incident up at the next family meeting." Then add the information to all the copies of the list.

Are there pay offs for not lying? Yes! #1. When you tell them "no" they don't argue because they know it will be useless. #2. They do their work because they know the promised consequences will surely take place. #3. You tell them once, and they listen.

Resources: Dr. James Jones, Familyhood Education Foundation, C. Harrison, GOODKIDS

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Michal Smith

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Vernonia's Voice is published on the 1st and 3rd Thursday. Our next issue will be out April 17th.



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