

Those little white lies? Your children are listening

The telephone rang as we sat down for dinner. I excused myself to answer the call. "Good evening. Is Mrs. Schmidt in, please?" I recognized the voice immediately. It was a telemarketer from a local non-profit organization where I had ordered five-year guaranteed light bulbs. For months the same two ladies had informed me of their establishment's needs and I purchased light bulbs for every socket in the house, given a few to our neighbors, and stored a half dozen backups in the basement.

My comments about having enough light bulbs didn't deter these sales women. The calls continued, but I didn't want to talk to the light bulb ladies. It usually took me ten minutes to politely disengage myself from a call.



Maren Schmidt

Kids Talk™

"No," I replied. "She's not here." "Do you know when she'll be back?"

"No. I don't know when she'll be back. Goodbye."

As I sat back down to dinner, my husband asked me who was on the phone.

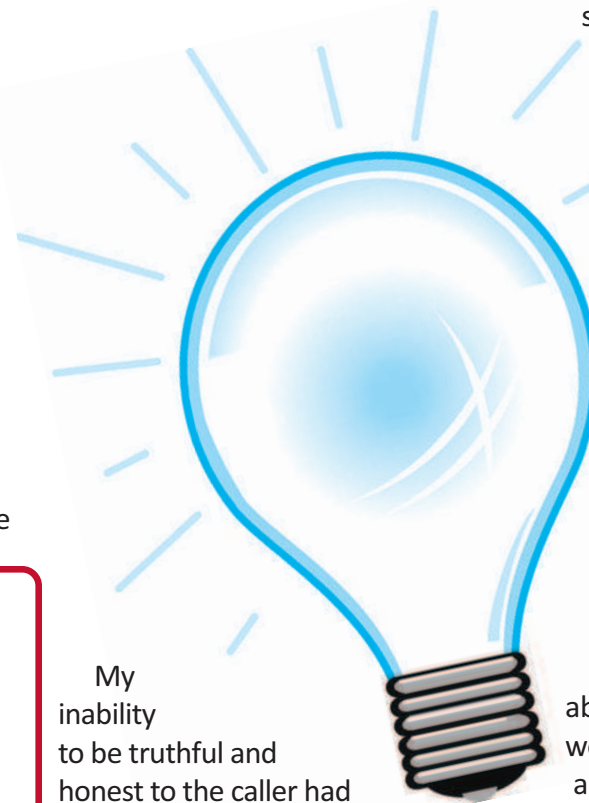
"The five-year light bulb people. They won't leave me alone."

"Well," Mark said. "Do you realize you just compromised your integrity to your children?"

It felt like a sledgehammer had hit me in the face. In my desire to be

non-confrontational and not to be rude, I had lied. Right in front of my three- and four-year-old daughters. As cool as you please.

What slippery slope had I slithered? There was manure in the barnyard and I was right in the middle of it.



My inability to be truthful and honest to the caller had compromised my principles. Why did I find it impossible to give any of a number of honest messages, such as: Excuse me. We are sitting down to dinner. I can't talk to you. Or — Thank you for calling. I have all the light bulbs I need for the next five years. Goodbye. Or — I could have been flat out rude and hung up the phone.

But for whatever reasons, I had found it easier to fib. A white lie, a polite lie, but a falsehood, nonetheless. Casual deceit was not something I wanted to pass down to my children. It was true confession time.

"What I just did was wrong. I should have told the lady on the



Parenting Tip

phone that I didn't want to buy anymore light bulbs or that I was busy with dinner. I didn't want to hurt the sales lady's feelings. I didn't want her to think I was mean and rude. But it is better to have the person on the phone think I'm rude than to have my family think I'm a liar."

Our actions illuminate who we are. From my embarrassment I realized that I needed to choose my words carefully. I learned that in awkward situations there is a way to be honest, yet direct and kind. This was critical as I became uncomfortably aware of how my actions and words could influence my children and impact their perception of acceptable conduct.

That evening, dealing with my little white lie and my humiliation, I uncovered a fundamental truth: Whatever you do, intentional or not, lights a path for your children. Make sure you're headed in the right direction.

Kids Talk™ is an award-winning column dealing with childhood development issues written by Maren Stark Schmidt, M.Ed. She has more than 25 years experience working with young children and is the author of Understanding Montessori: A Guide for Parents. Contact her via e-mail at maren@kidstalknews.

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