



THE Truth About Lying

Psychologists say the average person tells more than 1,000 lies a year—but it's still within a parent's power to raise a reasonably truthful child

By **STANLEY S. JACOBS**

EVER SINCE EVE, people have been prone to telling lies. But only in recent years have psychiatrists, psychologists, and physiologists teamed up to learn what makes a liar tick.

One researcher, Professor Byrne J. Horton of DePaul University, operated a "Liars' Clinic" to learn just how honest we are. He asked 5,000 students this question: "Pretend you have a rich uncle who sends you fine presents and gifts of cash. One day he gives you a painting which you detest and then asks, 'How do you like it?' Would you tell him the truth?"

Fifty-three percent of the students said they would tell the truth. But 33 percent admitted they would lie about liking the gift, and 14 percent were evasive, declaring they would duck the question or be noncommittal. Thus, almost half would ignore or alter the truth to remain on good terms

with the rich relative. And most of these saw nothing morally wrong with telling "white lies"!

In real-life situations, attitudes are much the same. Psychologists say the average person tells three lies a day—or more than 1,000 a year!

But the tendency to lie varies greatly from person to person. High on the list of generally truthful people are scientists, laboratory workers, architects, and engineers—individuals who work with precise measurements in which a millimeter can't be evaded, stretched, or denied. On the other hand, actors, politicians, press agents, artists, sculptors, authors, and musicians rate considerably lower, due, no doubt, to their heightened imaginations.

Professional criminals are in a class by themselves. A truthful hoodlum is almost a contradiction in terms because many of them are psychotic, and inveterate lying is a symptom of their mental aberrations. Fortunately, pathological lying (pseudologia phantastica) is rare among law-

abiding folks. Only extensive psychiatric treatment can help the pathological liar.

Telling a lie involves real work for the body. Your metabolism, pulse rate, blood pressure, and respiration speed up when you fib—and your eyes do tend to get shifty. In an experiment conducted by Dr. F. K. Berrien of Colgate University, an ophthalmograph was used to photograph eye movements as students replied to certain questions. In most instances, those who lied could not keep their gaze fixed on the questioner's face.

Emotional health plays a big role in the tendency to lie. Psychiatrists at the University of Leyden in Holland found that more than 80 percent of their patients who conceded that lying was a problem proved to be nervous, high-strung, and irritable. "Their untruthful responses primarily were a symptom of hidden emotional illness," the researchers said.

One man hated his clerk's job but wouldn't admit it, even to himself. He found self-esteem in lying about grandiose business successes. And a dour middle-aged woman who persistently lied to her children about alleged shortcomings of their father admitted she was jealous of the man—he was 12 years younger than she and quite personable.

AS YOU MIGHT SUSPECT, children are the most frequent fibbers. But before the age of five a child cannot really lie; his whoppers are by-products of creative, unbridled imagination. It is at the 5- to 10-year stage that unchecked lying may harden into a behavior pattern which has life-long bad effects.

Fortunately, you have it in your power to keep lying at a minimum in your children. Researchers at Columbia University studied 5,000 children for five years and found that the single most powerful incentive to truth-telling is a home in which all family members speak their minds—even if it hurts!

Dr. Elizabeth B. Hurlock, past president of the American Psychological Association's division on the teaching of psychology, has some additional suggestions for helping children become reasonably truthful adults:

1. If a child lies, make sure you know *why*. To him, the reasons for lying may be overwhelming.
2. Avoid such old-fashioned "cures" as washing out the mouth with soap or applying the hickory switch. These don't correct fibbing.
3. Don't invoke God's name by saying such things as, "God knows you lie—and will punish you." A terror of God as prosecutor, judge, and jailer may result.
4. Help your child understand his own imagination, and he will learn to control it. You know he didn't *really* see a dragon; the trick is to get him to admit its nonexistence to himself.
5. If you commit mistakes, admit them to your family. Too many children lie to cover up errors. When they realize that Mom and Pop can err, too, the incentive to fib is diminished.

COVER:

Actress Mitzi Gaynor dons an eye-stopping, burnt-gold turtle-neck blouse over a slim chocolate-brown skirt. They're part of her new travel wardrobe, all available in patterns on p. 8. Photo by John Engstead.

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