



## Parenting the Preschooler

### Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

# What do you do when your preschooler lies?

#### Ages & Stages

**PRESCCHOOLER** A child who is 3 to 5 years of age.

**YOUNG CHILD** A child who is 0 to 8 years of age.

#### Minding Our Language

**Families come in all shapes, sizes, and styles. A “family” may include people who are related by blood, by marriage, and by choice. “Parents” may be biological, step-, foster, adoptive, legally appointed, or something else. When we use the words “family” and “parent” in these materials, we do so inclusively and with great respect for all adults who care for and work with young people.**

Children lie for many reasons. Sometimes they are just pretending, but other times they are choosing to not tell the truth on purpose. It might be because they are afraid they are going to get into trouble or because they are worried that someone will be mad at them. Keep in mind that lying is normal for preschoolers. How you handle it now, though, will affect how they behave as they get older.

Try these techniques for helping your child learn about lying:

- Explain what lying is and tell them how you feel about it. If you think the behavior is wrong, say that, and be ready to talk about why you feel that way. Tell them when they lie, people may doubt them the next time.
- Teach your child the difference between what is real and what is not. Use television, books, video games, and even their dreams to talk about the differences between fantasy and reality.
- Discuss different types of lies with your child. Hurtful lies are different from lies people tell to be polite. Decide what, if any, types of lies you will tolerate from your child.
- Talk with them about what makes it hard to tell the truth sometimes. Be prepared to tell them about a time when it was hard for you, but you still told the truth. Teach your child different ways to solve problems.
- Use stories that do not involve your child to help them learn to be truthful. Try something like, “Juan’s mother saw cookie crumbs all over his face, but when she asked him if he climbed on the counter to get the cookies, he said ‘no.’” Then ask her follow-up questions like, “What do you think happened?” “Why do you think Juan said that?” and “What could he have done or said differently?”
- Have realistic expectations that your child can live up to. If you expect them to be perfect, they may lie to gain your approval.
- Avoid labeling your child as a liar. Calling children liars may cause them to attach the negative label to themselves and can make them feel bad about themselves.
- Be consistent. If you tell your child they will not get into trouble for telling the truth, do not discipline them when they do so.
- Tell the truth yourself. Your child will learn a lot about being honest and telling lies by watching what you do and say.
- Praise and acknowledge your child every time they tell the truth.

## Find Out More

MSU Extension provides the following resources for parents and caregivers of preschoolers and young children at no or low cost. Be sure to check out these and other MSU Extension resources available at [www.extension.msu.edu](http://www.extension.msu.edu).

**Extension Extras** (<https://bit.ly/2LC2vdX>) – These compilations of news articles, activities, parenting tips and advice are published online Monday through Friday. The resources are designed for parents and caregivers of young children who are home all day during the novel coronavirus pandemic. Each day has a theme: Mindful Mondays, Tips on Tuesday, Working Wednesdays, Thinking Thursday, and Fun Fridays.

**Extension Extras Enrichment Kits** (<https://bit.ly/35QAplQ>) – These kits feature five or six early childhood activities with learning goals focused in areas such as social and emotional health, literacy, and STEM; a supply list; suggested children's books; introduction letters explaining how to use the materials; and an evaluation. The kits are available as free downloads.

**Early Childhood Videos** (<https://bit.ly/3ioyEkS>) – These short videos offer parents and caregivers of young children information on parenting topics. Titles include "Perspective Taking," "Family Movies," "Goals of Misbehavior," "Using Thinking and Feeling Words," "The Waiting Game," and "When Siblings Fight."

**Building Early Emotional Skills (BEES) in Young Children** (<https://bit.ly/38XW4Kl>) – This page provides links to a variety of free online parenting courses, workshops, and events offered by MSU Extension for parents and caregivers of young children aged 0 to 3.

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