



Parenting the Preschooler

Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

How do you respond when your child tells tales?

Ages & Stages

PRECHOOLER 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.

Preschoolers have very active, creative imaginations. They like to tell stories that mix fantasy and reality. Sometimes these stories are a part of their play, but many times they come out as an answer to a question or during a talk with an adult. Many parents worry when children begin to tell these pretend stories.

Remember that pretending and storytelling are important activities that help preschool children learn about the world. This behavior is normal for children, but there are some things you can do to help your child learn the difference between real and pretend.

- Explain what lying is and tell them how you feel about it. If you think the behavior is wrong, tell them, and be ready to talk about why you feel that way.
- Model honesty. Your child will learn how to tell the truth, or how to tell lies, by watching what you do and say.
- Teach them 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.
- Use reality-based statements when you want something from your child. Specific statements (“*I expect you to pick your clothes up off the floor.*”) work better than vague complaints (“*I wish you would clean your room.*”).
- 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.
- When your preschooler tells lies, respond with a statement that shows them you know they have told a tall tale. (“*Wow! That’s a great story.*” “*You have such a great imagination!*” “*Tell me more about that – I like to pretend, too!*”)

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.

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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