Addressing and Managing a Child Who Habitually Lies

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ADHD and Compulsively Lying – Is Your Child Habitually Lying?

An issue that many parents of ADHD children must deal with is habitual lying. It is often poor organization that causes ADHD and lying to go together. For example, the child may forget to do something they were told, and then later when confronted about it, they will say that no one told them to do anything.

Lying isn't just a problem for children. Adult ADHD and lying can go hand in hand, too, so it's important to address your child's lying now, so it doesn't continue.

Reasons Why Children with ADHD May Lie

Not all children with ADHD habitually lie, and some are impulsively honest, which can also create problems. For children who lie, the habit can quickly become a problem.

Children with ADHD don’t tell big lies. They generally lie about everyday things, like whether they did homework or chores.

When these children lie, they are not trying to be defiant. It is usually about struggling to cope.

Forgetfulness

A child with ADHD who has been told to come home right away after school may acknowledge what their parent has asked of them. But they later do not follow through.

When confronted by the parent, the child insists the parent never told him. The parent may think the child is lying when he likely forgot.

Forgetfulness is a part of everyday life for someone with ADHD. It includes forgetting routine things and important dates.

Many kids with ADHD struggle to recall and manage repetitive tasks. For example, your child may remember feeding the dog, but she may not recall when this occurred.

It can be hard for children with ADHD to place events, which can make them appear as if they are lying.

They Use Lying to Cope

Lying may be a coping mechanism for children with ADHD. Lying can help your child to feel less stressed especially about tasks he or she finds burdensome and complicated.

For example, you tell your child to clean their room, and an hour later, he tells you his room is clean, but when you check, the room is still a mess.

The task of cleaning up isn't a simple one for a child with ADHD. They have trouble starting tasks and planning what it is they need to do.

A child lies because it takes away the burden of trying to determine how to clean his room and/or ask for help.

Immaturity

Children and teens with ADHD tend to struggle with social and emotional maturity, especially as compared to their peers without ADHD. They tend to appear insecure, selfish and irresponsible.

And of their immaturity, rather than take responsibility, they lie or blame others.

Inability to Analyze Situations

Children with ADHD tend to take the easy way out. They don't know how to analyze a situation or think about consequences of their actions.

They lie because they think it can resolve a problem without thinking about the additional issues that may arise.

Fear and Anxiety

ADHD children don't do well with making mistakes. As a result, they act impulsively to avoid getting in trouble or taking the blame.

Promoting the Truth

If your child with ADHD continually lies, you may view him or her as dishonest. But it is important to recognize your child is likely responding to the challenges of ADHD, rather than being defiant or trying to test your patience.

It is important to find ways to help your child stop lying. Here are some things you can do to support them towards telling the truth.

The Benefit of the Doubt

Accept that your child's lies aren't necessarily intentional or an act of defiance. Moreover, if you don't give your child the benefit of the doubt, you are only stressing yourself and your child.

Show Some Empathy

Let go of any ideas that your child is manipulating you or trying to get away with something.

Your child is not trying to blame someone else or hurt you. He or she is doing the best they can given the circumstances.

Your child needs your empathy and compassion, not your anger.

Next page: Learn more reasons why your child is compulsively lying and how to help your ADHD child become more honest.

ADHD and Compulsively Lying

Be Understanding Without Excusing Lies

You shouldn't excuse your child's lies, but you should show your child that you understand why they are lying. For example, you may tell your child, "I understand you are struggling so let's figure out how to backtrack and resolve this situation better."

You should also talk to your child about happened, including the reasons for the lying. Then, help him find better ways to handle the situation differently in the future.

Don't Give Your Child Opportunities to Lie

Children with ADHD are not particularly good with details, but if you press, you give your child an opportunity to lie. Even if you know exactly what your child did, don't press him for answers. Instead, move forward with a fair punishment.

It is also important to try to avoid scenarios where lying is a choice. For example, if he is supposed to do homework, rather than ask if he did it, go and check. If the homework isn't done, tell him to complete his school work and put away whatever he was doing instead.

Praise Honesty

When children receive positive reinforcement, they will be motivated to keep doing good.

Therefore, when you catch your child telling the truth, offer praise for her honesty. You can also reward your child for telling the truth especially in situations where it is tempting to lie.

Just be careful not to reinforce negative behavior. For example, if your child intentionally lies and ADHD symptoms are not to blame, make sure you address this lying rather than ignoring it.

Help Your Child

If your child struggles with certain tasks, give them a list of steps to help them. For example, if your child struggles to set the table, offering a list will make the job easier and remove the stress that would cause the child to lie.

Remind Your Child to Think Before Speaking

Impulsiveness makes children with ADHD answer too quickly, often resulting in lying. Give your child verbal instructions to think before she answers.

If you give your child an opportunity to think before speaking, you are more likely to get a more truthful response.

Manage Symptoms to Help Stop Lies

In a child, compulsive lying often comes from the inability to treat and manage ADHD symptoms. Though you should discipline your child or teen for any lying, you should also help your teen to manage the symptoms that cause him/her to lie.

For example:

- **Impulsivity –** Sometimes a child with ADHD will do something on impulse when they should be doing something else. For instance, your teen wants to borrow the car to go to the library to study. However, his attention gets diverted, and he decides to go to the mall. Later, his mom wants to know how his studying went. He lies and says it went well. His mom soon finds out he didn't go to the library like he said he did. While the teen should face consequences for the lying, medication or other treatment adjustments should be considered to help with distraction and impulsivity.

- **Inability to stay on task –** Many ADHD children cannot stay on task to finish things like homework, for instance. An ADHD child may hide the fact that she has several incomplete homework assignments. The fact that she is hiding this from her parents should be disciplined. However, she needs to be taught the necessary organization strategies to overcome this problem.
- **Boredom –** ADHD kids often lie to get out of tasks they find boring, such as household chores. The thing to do to help this situation is to make the tasks more interesting. You could try playing their favorite music while they are doing the dishes.

How to Address ADHD Habitual Lying

The lying issue needs to be examined so parents can figure out why it occurs and persists. If the child is having problems at school, it may be an academic problem. If the lies are mischievous, for example, to hide alcohol use or other delinquent behavior, they need to be dealt with in a strict way.

The following are suggestions to handling the issue of lying:

- Discuss with your child the serious consequences of compromising the trust between the two of you. Tell him or her how it can be rebuilt.
- Outline what the consequences are for lying.
- When calling the lie out, do it in a calmly and respectfully way without anger.
- Demand accountability and reward honesty.
- Be an honest person yourself, so you are a good role model.
- Always be respectful when engaging with your ADHD child or teenager, as it facilitates a positive relationship.

The Takeaway

It is important to work with your child to break the cycle of lying and getting in trouble, as these can affect your child in the long-term. Focus on your child’s strengths and giving them appropriate support and praise.

If you are struggling to get your child to cooperate and stop lying, you may want to enlist the help of a psychologist who works with children who have ADHD and their families. And if you find yourself feeling alone in your struggles of raising a child with ADHD, look into support groups with other parents of a child with ADHD.