

Lying

What to do when you hear, 'I didn't do it,' and you know your child did

"I didn't do it."

Your child has probably told you that more than once. It may be the truth. But often, it is not.

Is your child lying? Not really; at least not the way adults think of lying.

When preschool children deny doing something that their parents saw them do, it may sound like a lie, but it is probably something else.

Sometimes, children are really pretending – saying something they wish to be true, such as, "No, I didn't write on the wall."

Sometimes, what sounds like a lie is really your child trying to answer a question even though they don't know the answer. They may make up an answer. But that isn't really a lie, it's more like a guess.

It can be upsetting for parents when their children say things that aren't true. When you understand how children think about the world, you can help your child to be more truthful.

On Back

What to do when your child is not telling the truth.

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You & Your Child



What to do when you hear, 'I didn't do it,' and you know your child did

Help your child understand what really happened

Children must learn that wishing something didn't happen or saying something didn't happen won't change the fact that it actually did happen.

Your child needs your help to understand what really happened. It's your job to set them straight, but do it in a kind way.

If you know your child did something, but he or she denies it, try saying: "Even though you say you didn't mark the wall with a crayon, look, it really happened."

This also works when your child makes up a story he or she wishes were true. If, for example, your child tells a friend you have a new puppy, but you don't have a puppy, you say, "No, we didn't get a puppy. You just wish that we got a puppy."

Be kind when your child makes little mistakes

One of the things children fear most is disappointing their parents.

Children learn that if they didn't do something wrong, their parents won't get upset with them, and they won't be punished. When they do something wrong, it is natural for them to deny it.

Encourage your child to tell the truth.

Be gentle when he or she makes little mistakes. Help your child see what went wrong, but don't be harsh.

Let your child know that it is safe to tell the truth – that he or she won't upset you by telling you what really happened.

If your child did something wrong, help him or her fix the problem

After explaining that what your child denies doing actually happened, work with your child to fix the problem.

If, for example, your child marks a wall with a crayon, you and your child should clean the wall together.

Your child will realize the wall didn't mark itself and that it won't get cleaned unless someone cleans it. That will help your child take responsibility for his or her actions in the future.

Praise your child for telling the truth

It is just as important to help children feel good about telling the truth as it is to help them realize what they did wrong.

You can do both at the same time.

If, for example, your child drew on the refrigerator with a marker and admitted doing it, you can say, "Thank you for telling me the truth. But you did draw on the refrigerator and you'll have to help me clean it."

After you help your child fix a problem, remind him or her again that telling the truth is a good thing.

Keep In Mind

- Preschoolers usually aren't really lying when they say, "I didn't do it," even though they really did.
- Telling the truth must be encouraged.
- Praise your child when he or she admits doing something wrong.
- Be understanding when your child admits to little mistakes.
- Teach your child that it is safe to tell the truth.

