

**Don't overreact.** Punishing kids this ago for lying isn't helpful since they don't realize they've done something wrong, says [Betsy Brown Braun](#), author of *Just Tell Me What to Say: Sensible Tips and Scripts for Perplexed Parents*. Plus, if you freak out, your child may be afraid to admit his mistakes in the future. Instead of putting him in a time-out for claiming that he didn't break his brother's toy when he clearly did, talk to him about how important it is to respect other people's things.

**Don't ask a question if you already know the answer.** Asking "Who spilled the juice?" when your child is the obvious culprit just puts her in a position to lie. However, phrasing the question in a calm, curious way ("Gosh, there's juice all over the table. I wonder who will help me clean it up?") makes it easier for her to come forward and admit she did it.

**Explain why truthfulness matters.** Even though your child hasn't figured out the difference between truth and lies, that doesn't mean you should ignore his fibs in the meantime. If your toddler claims he didn't touch the cookie jar even though there are crumbs on his lips, for example, explain that you care more about getting an honest answer from him than you do about the missing cookies.

**Talk about the difference between fantasy and reality.** You don't want to squelch your child's imagination, especially since kids often use out-there tales to deal with their worries and fears. But if your toddler refuses to waver from her explanation that a lion is responsible for the rip in her new pants, do show your skepticism: "What a great story! That must have been pretty scary. I've never seen any lions in our neighborhood, though. Are you sure that's what happened?"

**Thank your child for telling the truth.** When he comes to you with a confession—for example, he watched TV when you told him he couldn't—praise his honesty before reminding him of your tube-time limits. When your toddler realizes the importance of honesty (and feels safe admitting his slipups), he'll get in the habit of telling the truth.

## Are White Lies Okay?

There's no getting around it: A white lie is still a lie. "But it's important to explain to kids that once in a while, we stretch the truth so someone's feelings don't get hurt," says author [Betsy Brown Braun](#). For example, if Grandma's coming to visit with a birthday gift for your child, remind him to thank her even if it's something he didn't want, like a sweater. But don't encourage him to rave about the sweater either. A simple "It was nice of you to get me a gift, Grandma" works well here, says [Zero to Three's Claire Lerner](#).

But white lies are never okay when you use them on your child. If he asks if a shot at the doctor's will hurt, tell him it's going to sting but the shot is important and it'll be over quickly. "You have to model honesty even when you know the truth will make your child unhappy, because you need to build trust," says Braun.

## Toddlers' Best Whoppers



My son, Luke, lies about washing his hands after he goes to the bathroom, yet he never seems to realize that I can tell when the water is running. If I don't hear it, I ask him if he washed his hands, and he'll say yes. When I call him on it, he gets annoyed and says, "Okay, okay, I'll go back and wash!"

**Katie Voss; Iowa City, Iowa**

Most of my daughter Quinn's fibs involve her "friends" Sweetie and Norny. Her invisible pals have colored our windowsills with crayons, smeared glitter on our kitchen chairs, and cut the fringe off our living-room rug and glued it onto construction paper.

**Kathleen Niedermaier; Niles, Ill.**

My 3-year-old, Jimmy, has a friend named Nicole, also 3, who was going through a biting stage. We were in Nicole's backyard playing one day, and out of nowhere she leaned over and bit Jimmy on the arm. Even though I saw it happen I asked, "Did Nicole just bite you?" and I could see his mind working—he knew Nicole would get in big trouble if he said yes. So he looked me straight in the eye and said, "No, Daddy."

**Alex Ruskell  
South Dartmouth, Mass.**