**RAISING HEALTHY CHILDREN**

**WHO KNOW AND TELL THE TRUTH**

Behind everything we’ve been taught about truth, we can find an awful lot of truth:

* *Don’t tell lies.* Moses, quoting God in the 10 Commandments, modern translation
* *Honesty is telling the truth to other people. Integrity is telling myself the truth.* Spencer Johnson
* *Every lie is two lies: the lie we tell others and the lie we tell ourselves to justify it.* Robert Brault
* *We are as sick as our secrets.*  12- step recovery
* *Honesty is the best policy.* Shakespeare

# My dad taught me to realize that by admitting my mistakes and taking my punishment, I would get my pain over with, and minimize it. Life has taught me the same thing. That’s why parents should explain to their children that they will give light punishment for acts of selfishness, impulsivity, and poor judgment, and heavier punishment for deliberate lies to cover up those acts. It’s the same for broken promises (but we can make *better* promises, when we get better information).

*Preschool and Elementary Years*

A good parent might say, *“You wish you hadn’t broken that. But you did. You wish you could forget you broke that. But I want you to remember, so you can learn not to do that again. You wish I would not know that you broke that, or that I wouldn’t care, but I know, and here’s why I care. . . .”*

During these years, children need to learn from *The Boy who Cried Wolf.* Punish lies by not believing a lying child later, the next time they may be trying to avoid punishments they deserve*.* Don’t believe things if the evidence and the track records indicate otherwise. Our discipline should prepare children for how things will go for them in life: *Actions have consequences. When you abuse a privilege, you lose a privilege. That’s life.*

*Middle and High School*

At this age, friends and peer groups sometimes create experiences that teach sickening habits and attitudes to our children, and give them a false reality, about what’s real, what works, and what’s important. They need us to correct these deceptions, and they need to learn how they can tell those things for themselves. Tell them it’s all about what will make them and other people sick or healthy.

**Tell them where you get your truth, and why.** Three great places to learn what’s best for all concerned in the long run are:

* *spiritual truths*, found in the Bible and church traditions, which have stood the test of time,
* *physical/natural truths,* found in objective, academic/scientific research, and
* *socially determined truths*, found in laws, courts, elections, and *healthy* polls and journalism.

(These last two sources of truth would not include people who are *proven to be* paid to discover or report things that create power or money for those who hire them.)

It is also healthy to teach children to identify *more* *personal sources of truth*. These aren’t necessarily unhealthy, but they are clearly biased:

* their parents’ reality (yes, that’s you -- they know you’re biased, so it’s best to admit it. It’s also best to ask them to say where they think you aren’t being honest, and then admit your own lies), and
* their own mental and emotional reality (their feelings, memories, opinions, and beliefs, which are just as biased as yours).

Then you can explain there is *a third source for truth that is even more biased* than the healthy personal sources just described, and way more biased than the sources first mentioned above, authorities from the culture at large. The most biased set of beliefs and “facts” are from subcultures with vested interests. They don’t even value the five previous sources of truth mentioned above.

As a parent, you will be tempted to explain what you feel those biased subcultures are. But it works better to ask adolescent and young adult children to research this for themselves. Ask them to tell you what they have found out about where their “authorities” are getting their truth. This can be really interesting. If they don’t come back and tell you what their research has found, they are demonstrating they’re just believing what makes them feel good about themselves, the way preschoolers do.

Finally, you will be more credible to your child if you seriously ask yourselves as parents these questions:

* *Do we keep our promises, and make only promises that need to be kept?*
* *Do we lie to avoid facing the truth about ourselves? Do we admit it when we do?*
* *Do we learn from painful truths that set us free from our illusions and bad habits?*
* *Do we show submission to authority for truth, power, reality, and validity that’s higher than ours?*
* *Do we check the facts about what’s going on in the world by consensus of different sources?*
* *Who do we trust to know what’s most important, what will last? Why do we trust them?*
* *Do we spend too much time with realities that are virtual, instead of virtuous and real?*
* *What groups, leaders, or celebrities are we most loyal to? Do we know what they’re loyal to?*
* *Do we lecture our children, or do we* ***ask them all these questions, to draw the truth out of them****?*

When you explain what you learned from asking yourselves these questions, you have earned the right to be believed. If your child doesn’t answer the questions, and doesn’t believe you either, explain that *until they do, they are forfeiting their seat at the table* where their privileges and discipline are decided. That seat has to be earned by adult behavior. Until then, you will set the consequences for their actions without their input.