

Someone recently ask me what to do about her preschooler's new habit of telling lies. It is important to understand that preschoolers have a very difficult time separating fiction and reality. Think about the fact that their world is filled with fiction. We seldom explain to them that the story we are reading is not true. In addition to the stories that we read to them, we also spin tales of Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy and the Easter Bunny. I am not suggesting that we eliminate those stories. I am only explaining how we contribute to children's confusion about fantasy and reality.

If your preschooler begins to lie to you, you must determine the reason that he is telling lies. He may have a vivid imagination and is telling an incident the way he imagines it might be. An example would be the child who embellishes a story about something that happened to him. He may be lying simply to entertain his listeners.

For a child who lies to entertain, help him separate fantasy from reality. Say something like, "I really like the story you are creating. You are making it even better than what really happened. Sometimes I need to know exactly what happened without the extra part that you are adding. Can you tell me just exactly what really happened?" Usually, such a comment will get a child back on track to the reality of his story.

The other reason that a child lies is to escape punishment. Do not force a young child into a corner where he feels that the only way to escape is to lie. Suppose that you discover that the cookie jar is open, crumbs are all around and cookies are missing. The normal parental response is to ask the question, "Did you get cookies without permission?" That is an unnecessary question. You know if your child is guilty. Do not give him an opportunity simply to answer "No." It is better to say, "Let's clean up the mess that you left around the cookie jar." As you help him clean up, talk about the importance of asking for cookies, waiting until after dinner or following any other rule you have about the cookie jar.

Through gentle training and admonition, you will start your child down the pathway of truthfulness - to God, to himself and to others.