

When do children learn to tell lies?

Is it a bad thing if children tell lies? Scientists don't think so. This short video explains why.

Tasks

Do the preparation task first. Then watch the video and do the exercises. You can also read the transcript.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. to sneak in
2. to work out
3. rigged
4. to be somebody's fault
5. to get caught
6. resourceful
7. complicit
8. to get away with it

Definition

- a. included in a plan to do something wrong
- b. to be identified as the person who did something wrong
- c. to find a solution after thinking
- d. to be the person who caused a certain problem or mistake
- e. to enter a place in a quiet, secret way
- f. able to find solutions to problems, even when in a new situation
- g. prepared in a dishonest way, so that a certain result will happen
- h. to escape punishment for having done something wrong

Task 1

Circle the best answer to complete the sentences.

1. The children say that the chocolate cake was touched by ...
 - a. both people and animals.
 - b. other people.
 - c. some animals.
2. The psychologist says that lying is important because it shows that children can ...
 - a. escape dangerous situations.
 - b. learn skills for their future work.
 - c. understand other people.
3. The psychologists agree that four-year-olds are usually ...
 - a. not able to lie.
 - b. very skilled liars.
 - c. very subtle liars.
4. When asked about the sweets on the floor, the four-year-old blonde boy (Elie) accepts ...
 - a. all the responsibility.
 - b. none of the responsibility.
 - c. partial responsibility.
5. After the six-year-olds eat the sweets, they feel ...
 - a. a sense of panic.
 - b. confident that they can invent lies.
 - c. wonderful.
6. The psychologist says that the six-year-olds have learned that lying is ...
 - a. a group effort.
 - b. very easy.
 - c. wrong but necessary.
7. When asked about the sweets on the floor, one of the six-year-old boys accepts ...
 - a. all the responsibility.
 - b. none of the responsibility.
 - c. partial responsibility.
8. The two psychologists agree that when children learn to lie, the parents will probably have ...
 - a. a sense of happiness.
 - b. a sense of worry.
 - c. mixed feelings.

Task 2

Complete the sentences with the words in the box.

complicit	fault	rigged
trouble	work	

1. Lying is a really important developmental skill. It tells us that the children can out what's in someone else's mind.
2. To test the children's lying skills at different ages, we left them alone with a gumball machine and told them not to touch it.
3. It was her for listening!
4. As long as you've got the rest of the group with you, you get away with it.
5. It shows how smart the kid is, even though it also shows that you're going to be in a lot of as a parent from now on.

Discussion

Do you remember any lies that you told when you were a child? Do you think parents should try to prevent their children from lying?

Transcript

Narrator: Who can resist an unmanned chocolate cake?

Boy 1: Shall we lick the top?

Boy 2: Yummy scrummy!

Boy 3: (laughs)

Narrator: But how best to cover your tracks?

Boy 1: Someone mysterious sneaked in when we were ...

Male adult: Someone mysterious sneaked in?

Boy 4: Yeah!

Female psychologist: (laughs) Lying is a really important developmental skill. It tells us that the children can work out what's in someone else's mind in order to try and deceive them.

Boy 1: A thief came in and took that.

Boy 2: They flew down, ate it and then flew back!

Male adult: So, an elephant and a giant bird came and smudged the cake?

Boy 3: Yeah!

Narrator: To test the children's lying skills at different ages, we left them alone with a rigged gumball machine and told them not to touch it. First, we see how the four-year-olds handle the situation.

Elie: I want a sweet now.

Girl 1: Are you going to turn it?

Zoe: No!

Elie: Do you want to turn it? Turn it!

(Zoe turns the wheel)

Male psychologist: Whoa! And it's gone!

Female psychologist: Oh no! They made Zoe turn it.

Girl 1: Do not turn it any more! Nobody turn it any more, OK?

Girl 2: I just keep doing it by accident!

Female psychologist: Lying is a very subtle skill. They frequently get uncovered at this age. They haven't got the ability to problem-solve their way out of it.

Male psychologist: They're not developmentally advanced enough to lie so they tell the truth.

Female adult: What happened?!

Girl 1: It was Zoe!

Zoe: He told me to turn this thing.

Female adult: Elie, did you tell Zoe to turn it?

Elie: Well, she didn't ... she ... yeah, but ... she listened.

Male psychologist: She listened! It was her fault for listening!

Narrator: Now it's the turn of the six-year-olds.

Children: Smarties! Sweets!

Narrator: They still turn the handle. They still gorge on sweets.

Boy 1: Yeah!

Narrator: They still panic about getting caught.

Boy 2: You guys, why did you touch that?

Narrator: But then they get rather more resourceful.

Boy 3: I've got a really, really good plan. We've got to say one lie, we've got to say one lie.

Male psychologist: This guy's just worked it out that you can lie, and as long as you've got the rest of the group complicit with you (Female psychologist: OK), you get away with it.

Female adult: (surprised gasp)

Boy 4: The Smarties all came out!

Female adult: I'm getting lots of apologies but I kind of want to know what happened.

Boy 3: I was running ... like this, yeah? So then we fell and banged it. So it was my fault.

Female psychologist: How ironic for parents that at the point at which their children learn to lie, they need to celebrate that as a huge developmental stage.

Male psychologist: It shows how smart the kid is, even though it also shows that you're going to be in a lot of trouble as a parent from now on.

Answers

Preparation task

1. e
2. c
3. g
4. d
5. b
6. f
7. a
8. h

Task 1

1. a
2. c
3. a
4. c
5. a
6. a
7. a
8. c

Task 2

1. work
2. rigged
3. fault
4. complicit
5. trouble