

How Well Is Your Child Avoiding the Deceit Trap?

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King David told us why we should passionately long to banish deceit from our children and ourselves. He posed the question, “*O Lord, who may abide in Thy tent? Who may dwell on Thy holy hill?*” In other words, “*Who gets the privilege of being near you, Lord?*”

The answer: “**He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart**” (Psalm 15:1-2).

Honesty is important to God. That is why it is crucial for us as parents to work together to raise a generation of young people who turn away from lies, who dwell near God, and who pursue righteousness all their days.

Here are some ways to test how well your child is handling the deceit trap:

Watch for cheating at school. This may not be the easiest type of deceit to detect. Observe your child’s study habits, homework, grades, and general demeanor related to school. Does it appear he is depending too heavily on others to get answers or help with homework? Are you helping more than you should? Stay in close touch with all of your child’s teachers. Make sure grades on the report card seem to match up with effort related to schoolwork. Tell your child’s teacher that you want to know if your child ever attempts to cheat.

If your child is caught cheating, gather all the facts. A trip to the school to talk with the teacher is best. Was it a one-time occurrence or are there suspicions of a pattern? Talk with your child. Sometimes teachers make mistakes or treat students unfairly. If cheating is confirmed, talk with your child. If the child admits to cheating and has not lied further about the incident, make sure you affirm him for telling the truth. However, consequences are definitely in order—both at school and at home. You must treat this as a very serious matter.

Have the child apologize to you, to the teacher, and to any child whose work he may have copied. Have him say, “I cheated. I was wrong. Will you forgive me?”

In most cases the teacher will give your child a zero or an F for cheating. Discuss with your child the consequences. He will need to study even harder to bring his grade up to offset the poor mark.

Finally, decide on an appropriate discipline for the offense. Grounding and/or hard labor around the house are often good choices.

The cheating issue has hit our family. A teacher called us, and we went through the shame. We met with the teacher. Our child was embarrassed.

As we talked to the child, we let him know that we were disappointed that he felt he had to cheat. We let him feel our shame. (Later the child told us that our shame had hurt worse than the penalty.) Then we asked our child to go to the teacher and ask his forgiveness. This child has never forgotten that lesson.

Stay alert. Keep your eyes and ears wide open. What are you observing about your child's behavior and attitudes? What is being said to you? Are you buying it? Watch for subtleties such as repeatedly "forgetting" to bring home a grade report from school.

Work with the child who is struggling with tardiness. A firstborn child generally is very prompt, but a sibling who follows may use tardiness as a way to demonstrate his emerging independence.

If a child consistently is late, one of the best ways to approach this (not in the heat of the moment) is to explain the natural consequences of what will happen if this continues. We make the tardy one clean the kitchen, a big job at our house.

Play the Decide in Advance game. Practically help your child decide in advance what he would do with a few of the many deceit-filled traps he will face as he grows up.

- You know you are not to ride your bike on the highway, but you're with a group of friends who turn onto the highway. When you stop, they all come back and say, "C'mon. Your parents will never find out." There are eight of them, and you are about to be left behind. What would you do?
- You make a bad grade at the end of the first nine weeks and decide to hide the report card, hoping you can pull your grade up by the semester's end. A week later your mom asks why you haven't brought home a report card. How do you answer?
- An envelope containing all of your sister's savings was left out on her dresser. There's more than eighty dollars in small bills, and you decide she'll probably never miss a 10-dollar bill. You take one. But that night there is a family meeting and your dad asks, "Did anyone happen to see an extra 10 dollars that's missing from sister's savings?" What would you say?
- Your mom asks you to clean the kitchen while she's running your brother to a soccer match. You don't do it. She comes back and asks you why you didn't clean the kitchen. You say, "I forgot." Is that the truth? What should you have said and done?

Do not surrender access to your child's room. Teenagers love to assert control over their own space, and to a fairly significant extent, a child's room should be his enclave of individuality and private peace. But it's still your house, and you are still the parent. Let your child know through your actions that you feel perfectly free to drop into the room frequently—both when your child is home (knock, of course) or away.

Sometime when the child is away, take inventory of the room—yes, do some discreet snooping. There’s a war going on for the mind and heart of your child. Don’t let the enemy slip some live hand grenades into your child’s life—bad music, pornography, alcohol, or drugs. And consider carefully whether to let a private phone line or phone extension be placed in that room, especially with a preadolescent or younger teen. Do you want him to have unlimited and unsupervised access to his peers?

Recruit a “spy” network. From now until your child leaves home and moves on to adulthood, you will slowly relinquish control, and the child will increasingly not be at home. In the interest of keeping tabs on how your child is handling new challenges, you need a network of parents, teachers, youth workers, coaches, employers, and other observers who will feel comfortable in sharing information with you occasionally. If they see your child going into a movie that they know you do not approve of, they should feel free to call and tell you.

My dad had these spies all over the neighborhood when I was growing up. The effect was that he seemed omnipresent, and I always felt accountable for my actions.

This intelligence gathering should be extremely discreet and certainly not overdone. Your child deserves the opportunity to build trust. But other parents may spot things about your children that may be hidden from you, such as how they drive when you are not with them. Friends who feel free to call you may prevent your child from going too far down the wrong path.

Ask probing questions. Even if you don’t learn much each time you do your quizzing, it’s good for a son or daughter to know you are going to be asking lots of questions. If a child is lying and trying to get away with something, you will catch him. Most children are just not that good at fibbing.

One parent shared the following scenario with me some time ago and I thought this would be the appropriate place to do so with you.

“One of our girls went to a conference alone for a couple of days. When she came back home, I sat on the edge of the bed and asked how things went.

“Great.”

“How about your relationship with boys?”

“That’s okay. No big deal.”

“There were no romances?”

“No, none of that.”

“Did you hold a boy’s hand?” Silence.

“Yes, but we went to this park, and, see, we were supposed to hold hands because there were a lot of people at the park and it was for security purposes.” Laughter.

I call this “peeling the onion.” And I peeled the onion one more layer and said, “Did you hold his hand at any other point?”

“W-e-l-l, as a matter of fact, I did on the bus on the way back.”

“Security needed then?”

“Ha, ha, Dad.”

“Did he try to kiss you?”

“No.”

“Did you try to kiss him?”

“No.”

“Good for you. I just wanted to make sure everything was okay.”

We don't carry on this type quizzing on a daily basis, but it's good for a child to know that you have a healthy curiosity and know how to ask some probing questions.

Pray for wisdom and opportunities to uncover deceit. God wants to help us with our children more than we can imagine. Perhaps your son is hanging around with some new friends and you feel unsettled. There's nothing outwardly wrong; you're just bothered. Ask God for wisdom and insight into the situation. He loves to respond to the prayers of helpless parents. Let us assure you, God *will* orchestrate circumstances to enable you to catch your child if he is deceiving you.