HONESTY NUDGES FOR KIDS

Difficulty: CASUAL | Frequency: VARIABLE | Duration: VARIABLE

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Being honest is not always easy. When kids are concerned with punishment or worried about what others will think if they admit to doing something wrong, they might shy away from telling the truth. By adopting this simple practice, parents can help cultivate honesty in their children.

This is important because honesty is fundamental to maintaining trust in relationships and can help strengthen the bonds children develop with others. Beyond these interpersonal benefits, honesty helps children grow into good citizens who can contribute to flourishing institutions and societies.

TIME REQUIRED

This practice is easy to adopt, as it can take as little as one minute.

HOW TO DO IT

As parents, we often try to encourage our children to tell the truth. But you can also encourage honesty indirectly by talking about the value of truthfulness in front of your children.

When talking with other adults around your child, be mindful to say positive things about honesty, truthfulness, and authenticity. This can be a simple conversation in which you briefly mention how happy the honesty of another child made you, or you acknowledge the honest behavior of another child as being good. The goal is simply to express your value for honesty to another person and to let your children overhear that message.

While this strategy is helpful to keep in mind in general, you can also use it in the moment—when you are particularly concerned that your child might be less than truthful. If your child did something wrong and you think they might deny it, for example, before asking about their behavior, take the time to talk to another person about the value of honesty.

Remember, the conversation is not meant to be directed at your child; it is simply meant to be overheard by them. This practice is most appropriate for young children between three and five years old and can also be helpful for slightly older children.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Sai, L., Liu, X., Li, H., Compton, B. J., & Heyman, G. D. (2020). Promoting honesty through overheard conversations. *Developmental Psychology, 56*(6), 1073–79.

Children between three and five years old were given the opportunity to cheat (although they were asked not to do so) by peeking at the answer in a guessing game. When asked whether they cheated, children who had overheard a conversation about adults being pleased with another child's honest behavior (e.g., "It made me so happy that he told the truth") were more likely to tell the truth about their own behavior, compared to children who overheard a different conversation about another child.

WHY TO TRY IT

Children learn from those around them by observing their behavior and listening to what they are saying. Children learn through the lessons they hear at school and from stories they read in books. In addition to honesty, research suggests that children can also learn from overhearing conversations about generosity.

When children overhear adults making positive or negative evaluations of others, it may lead them to reason about what behavior is appropriate for themselves. Talking about honesty around (but not to) your child may help them value and practice being more honest, without feeling like they are being lectured or pressured.

SOURCES

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This practice is part of Greater Good in Action, a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley and HopeLab.