

# our developing children

The Talwar Child Development Research Lab

SPRING 2013

## Research to Real Life: Major Lie-telling Milestones

Since the early 1900's, the development of lie-telling has been of interest to researchers. Our findings, along with previous results, suggests that children's abilities to deceive others evolve in several stages over time.

### 2 - 3 Yrs - "First Lies"

Children begin to make deliberately false statements in order to protect their self-interests, avoid punishment, or present themselves in a more positive light. However, their tendency to lie remains relatively infrequent at this age.

### 3 - 4 Yrs - "Simple Lies"

The tendency to deceive others becomes much more frequent. Children will readily tell a lie to conceal their own transgression. Researchers believe this increase in lie-telling is associated with the emergence of basic perspective-taking and self-control abilities. Thus, they are better able to predict what others expect of them and inhibit any non-verbal behaviors that are inconsistent with their dishonest claims. Nevertheless, they continue to struggle with maintaining their lies to follow up questions (often saying something that is inconsistent with their initial lie).

### 7 - 8 Yrs - "Sophisticated Lies"

Children become capable of sustaining their lies; providing subsequent statements and explanations that do not contradict their initial lie. This increased sophistication makes it difficult to distinguish their statements from those of a truth-teller, and is likely linked to developments in self-control and perspective-taking skills.

### "Prosocial Lies"

During early childhood, lies may be told for the benefit of others (aka "white lies"). This type of falsehood requires children to have a well-developed understanding of how another person thinks and feels (empathy). However, researchers suspect that these lies may not always be committed for the sake of another person. Rather, there is often a self-protective quality to these lies (e.g., prevents negative feelings that would otherwise be directed towards them).

### "Altruistic Lies"

Altruistic lies are those told solely for the benefit of another, with no expectation of reward or maybe even at one's own expense. Similar to prosocial lies, they require mature perspective-taking skills. Although it is not clear when children begin to engage in altruistic lying, researchers suspect these types of lies appear last; as children require less extrinsic reinforcement and become more aware of intrinsically motivating reasons for behaving.



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**MERCI!**



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Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)

National Science Foundation (NSF)

Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI)



# What's New at the Lab

Interested in participating in our studies? Check out these exciting opportunities to become involved.

## **2YR (3 year olds)**

Investigates the emergence of deception and the relationship between lie-telling and other abilities such as self-control and vocabulary in toddlers. The study takes approximately 1 hour 30 minutes. Monetary compensation is given for time.

## **BEHAVE (6-11 year olds)**

Boys will perform a series of games and tasks investigating their cognitive skills, lie-telling practices, perspective taking abilities, and externalizing behavioral tendencies. Parents will also be asked to complete a series of questionnaires. Study involves 2 sessions (1 hour each). Monetary compensation is given for time.

## **CHEATING (6-8 year olds)**

Children will complete a series of paper-based questionnaires about their perceptions of math class, math homework, and academic dishonesty. Parents will also be asked to complete several related questionnaires. The study takes 30 minutes to complete.

## **SPIRIT (7-11 year olds)**

Children are asked to fill out a paper based questionnaire regarding their views of spirituality. The study takes approximately 10-15 minutes and can be done online at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/36BHCD7>.

Children who complete the survey will be automatically entered in a draw to win a gift certificate to Toys R' Us or Indigo worth 50\$.

## **RECALL (6-12 years old) \*NEW\***

Children will complete a series of activities. They may then witness a researcher take money from a wallet and may be asked to lie about the incident. They will then be interviewed about the prior event using an interview technique known to increase adult's lie-detection rates. The study takes 1 hour and monetary compensation is given for time.

## **MORAL (4-7 years old)**

Children will witness a research assistant accidentally break a ball. They will be asked to keep a secret about the event. Children will be read a neutral or morally related fable by another researcher before being interviewed about the incident. The study takes 30 minutes.

## **In preparation**

We kindly ask that you refrain from telling your children about the purpose of our research to ensure a natural response. We recommend preparing children for the visit by discussing the activities they will be asked to do (e.g., playing games, answering questions, listening to stories).

## **Our debriefing procedure**

Given the nature of our research, we believe it is important to properly debrief children after our studies. This includes an explicit acknowledgment and praise of children's decisions to be truthful, role modeling of honest behavior, and a demonstration of the positive consequences that can arise from telling the truth. Lying is a common place practice among children and adults alike, however studies suggest we may be more likely to foster honesty in children by reinforcing instances of honest behavior, rather than focusing on and punishing dishonest behavior.

## Contact us

For more information or to participate in one of our studies ...

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WE TEST ON EVENINGS AND WEEKENDS AT YOUR CONVENIENCE!

CHILDREN RECEIVE A SMALL PRIZE FOR THEIR EFFORT AND TIME. MONETARY COMPENSATION IS OFFERED FOR SOME STUDIES.

WE WELCOME SIBLINGS OF PARTICIPANTS TO COME AND ENJOY OUR WONDERFUL PLAYROOM THAT IS PACKED FULL OF GAMES & TOYS.

STUDIES TAKE PLACE AT OUR RESEARCH LAB:

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