

# PORTLAND

*lifestyle & family*

MOTHERHOOD / PARENTING / NOVEMBER 1, 2015

## Ask Ariel: Little Liar, Big Lie



Dear Ariel,

My 8-year-old daughter lied to me for two days. She stole a \$100 bill and then spent the next two days insisting that she did not take the money. I finally discovered the cash in her stuff and confronted her with the lie. There was a tearful admission and pleas for forgiveness. I am so worried that she could keep up a big lie like that for such a long time, and really worried about what this means for her future. If she is lying to me as an 8-year-old, what will she be capable of as a teenager?

Signed, Concerned Mom

<http://www.portlandfamily.com/posts/ask-ariel-little-liar-big-lie/>

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Dear CM,

Even though developmentally and emotionally it’s quite normal for young children to lie, being lied to feels really awful, especially when it is your child trying to pull the wool over your eyes. In fact, kids less than 3 years old don’t have the developmental capacity to intentionally lie. Kids between ages 3 and 7 have a difficult time discerning between fantasy and reality, and the lies they tell often stem from their fantasy life. Just because your fourth-grader took some money and lied to you, it doesn’t necessarily mean she will be a rabble-rousing teenager in a few years.

By age 8, your daughter should understand right from wrong, both in regard to stealing the \$100 bill and then the subsequent lie to cover up her actions. She is old enough to hold two stories in her mind at once, the real story of stealing the money and the lie that she didn’t do it. Even though she is old enough to understand that lying and stealing is wrong, she may not fully grasp why there are rules and laws, so she tested the limits. Kids often lie to avoid feeling shame or to preserve their parents’ love for them. She likely lied to you for two days because she was worried on a subconscious level that you would stop loving her if she told the truth.

I have a couple suggestions of how to set up a family value of honesty and respect. All children need to know very specifically what the family rules and values are. If you haven’t yet explained to your daughter that it is very important in your family that everyone tells the truth, it would be a good thing to discuss on a regular basis. Teaching her how she can reestablish your trust in her and giving her some concrete examples are good places to start. It is also very important to model honest behavior. If your daughter lies or steals again, try to confront her about her behavior in a way that’s as mature, controlled and neutral as possible. At that time you can reteach the family value of honesty and share with her your disappointment in her behavior— and the fact that her behavior does not change how much you love her.

*Ariel Frager is a school counselor and has a private therapy practice that specializes in treating children, adolescents and families. She lives in Portland with her husband, son, dog and kitty cat.*

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