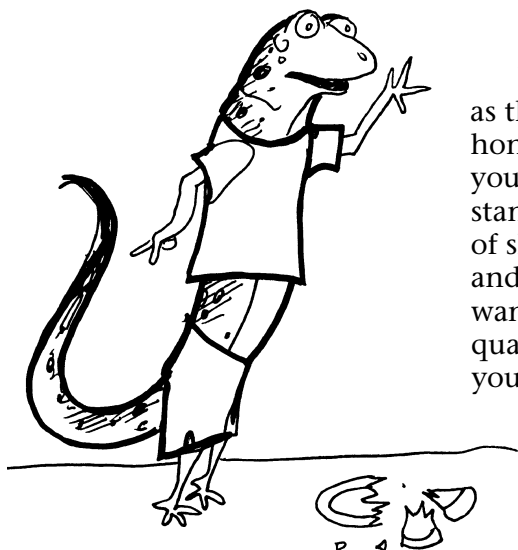


Chapter 16

Honesty: Taking a Closer Look



Very few habits are as important as the habit of honesty. Without honesty, all of the other qualities you have worked so hard on won't stand as strongly. Honesty is a way of showing respect, to other people and to yourself. Let's say that if you wanted to build a house of great qualities, then honesty would be your down payment.

Honesty is important in every aspect of life—with yourself, your family, your friends, in business, in law, in education and in international relations. There is no part of

life that is exempt from the call to be honest.

You may have many questions about honesty—that's good! You may wonder, is it possible to be completely honest all the time? Is it okay to be honest some of the time with some people and a little dishonest at other times with other people? You may also wonder why it is so hard to be honest, why it is often easier to lie. Isn't it okay to tell white lies when it will hurt someone's feelings to tell the truth? If you are supposed to be honest, then why are so many adults being dishonest? Let's take a look at honesty and try to answer some of these important questions.

What is Honesty?

Honesty is being sincere. When you are honest you are who you are. You are real, and not false. You do not try to be someone or something that you aren't. You do not exaggerate to make yourself sound better. You show others the true you, even when it would be easier to pretend. And all this is only part of being honest. A person who tends to be honest with himself will tend to be honest with others.

In other words, honesty is a way of life.

How Does an Honest Person Act?

- ☞ *He speaks the truth. He does not change what he says to make himself look better or to get something from someone else.*
- ☞ *She tells it like it is. She does not exaggerate to make a story more interesting or to make it seem like she was the real heroine when she wasn't.*
- ☞ *He tells people how he really feels. He does not lie to make things more comfortable.*
- ☞ *Her words and actions go together. She does what she says she will do.*

Last year I had a friend who constantly exaggerated. He always made himself sound so big. You would think that he owned half of the world by the way he talked. After a while I got sick of listening to him, and we stopped being friends.

Jerry, 13

Lies, Lies, Lies: Is It Ever Right to Be Dishonest?

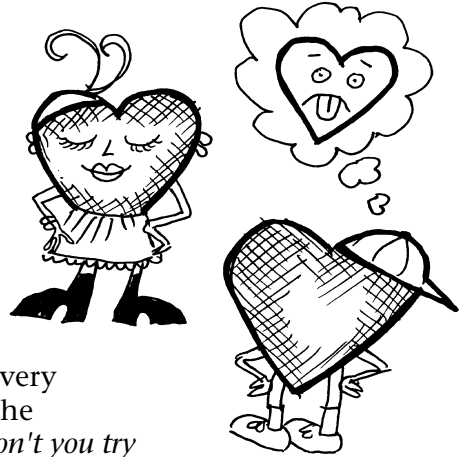
Lying: Deliberately saying something false in order to deceive someone.

There are several ways of not being honest. We have attempted to separate them out for you here to make it more clear. The truth about lies is that they don't fit nicely into little boxes. A lie is a lie. No matter how you add it up, lying is lying. Just to make it easier to understand exactly what is going on in the honest arena, here are some examples of lies.

One of the most common lies is the *white lie*. White lies appear innocent on the surface, but white lies are lies too. Even small untruths eat away at trust and respect in a relationship. A person

may tell a white lie to avoid hurting someone's feelings, and although the motivation is good, it is always best to tell the truth.

Imagine that a husband tells his wife that he likes a certain dinner she cooks. Actually he hates it. But he knows that she worked hard to cook for him, so he lies. Because he is dishonest, she prepares the same dish many more times, thinking he likes it. Every time he eats it, he hates it more! Finally he screams at her, *You're a lousy cook, why don't you try something new!* The wife is shocked and hurt.



White Lie: Seemingly innocent untruths that do not appear to hurt anyone but make things run more smoothly.

- ☹ *I didn't do too well on my history test. (You actually did terribly but you don't want your mother to know.)*
- ☹ *I like the story you wrote for English class. (You're not crazy about it, but you think your friend will get a good grade.)*
- ☹ *I like your new dress! (You do like the dress, but you are implying that you like the way it looks on your friend. It is a very unflattering dress, clinging to all the wrong places.)*

Withholding the truth: Deliberately keeping information to yourself when you should tell someone else.

- ☹ *You saw someone steal someone else's backpack, but you don't say anything.*
- ☹ *You know school is closing early but you don't tell your mother because you want to go to your friend's house after school and know she won't allow you to if you ask her.*
- ☹ *You know who started a fight, and it's not the person who got in trouble for it, but you stay silent.*

Exaggerating: Adding details to a story to make it more interesting.

- ☹ *I almost got to see a Yankees game when we were in New York! (Your family drove by the stadium when you got lost.)*
- ☹ *Mom, the test was really tough and that's why I failed. (You didn't study for it.)*

- ☞ *Last year I had a great year on the football team (You sat on the bench, but who will know now that you moved?)*

Then of course there is the most obvious category: *outright lies*. We don't need to define *outright lies* because they speak for themselves.

All lying hurts a relationship, and even hurts the person doing the lying. Eventually people will know that you are not telling the truth, and it hurts when no one believes you. Can't you feel it when someone is lying to you? A person may say something, but you watch their eyes, and the way their body moves awkwardly, and you know that they are telling you a lie. Some people are well practiced and can tell lies without showing it in their body language, but eventually the lies will catch up to them.

If lying hurts the person doing the lying, hurts relationships, and destroys trust and respect, then why is it so hard to be honest?

The Gray Areas

So, now that we have told you that it is wrong to lie, and that you should always be honest, we are going to make a few exceptions. Here are some examples for you.

- ☞ *A small child draws you a picture; the picture is not something to be hung in an art gallery. You tell the child that you like the picture. You want to encourage the child's drawing and generosity. It's okay.*
- ☞ *You go to eat dinner at someone's house. The host has been cooking all day and has a great dinner prepared. He enthusiastically offers you a dish you don't like. You take just a little and nibble on it. He is happy. You haven't eaten enough to feel sick. It's okay.*
- ☞ *You are hiding someone in your house. That person is being chased after by someone who is on the verge of being violent. The second person asks you if you have seen the person you are hiding. You say no. You have just done the right thing. (Now, call the police.)*

Once again, we would like to tell you that life is always clear-cut. It is not so. Sometimes you will have to hide the truth just a bit in order to be polite. It doesn't mean that you have to eat heaping bowls of something that you hate. It means that you can act with tact. Being tactful is the opposite of being tacky. If a little

child has made you something, you are not going to give her an art critique. Likewise, you are not going to turn someone over to a murderer. From time to time, these gray cases will pop up. Sorry about that. We recommend that you follow your conscience (we'll talk more about that later), and use your own good sense.

Yes, It's Hard to Be Honest

If honesty were an easy quality to have, everyone would have it. The truth about being honest is that it's hard. It is so much easier, in the short term, to tell little lies. But once you lie, you will have to tell other lies to cover up the first lie. Every time you lie, it becomes easier and easier, until you find that you are lying all the time. You may tell so many lies that you lose track of them, and then you get caught lying. Ouch!

Just like being dishonest, being honest is a habit and gets easier and easier every time you are honest. If you are awkward at first and have a hard time telling someone what you really think and feel, then the next time being honest will come more naturally. Think of it as flexing your honesty muscles: the more you flex, the stronger you get.

Being Honest Pays Off!

So, you are convinced. You have come to realize that you want to be one of the few people who are totally honest. But you wonder, what will being honest get me? Here are a few highlights:

- ☞ *When you are honest, you have respect for yourself.*
- ☞ *When you are honest, other people are more likely to respect you and you may get a reputation for being trustworthy.*
- ☞ *When you are honest, people will feel you are credible.*
- ☞ *When you are honest, you are free to be yourself. You do not pretend to be someone or something that you are not.*
- ☞ *When you are honest, you are free. You do not feel guilty about your lies, or worry about covering up for something you said or did.*
- ☞ *When you are honest, you have a better start to building meaningful relationships with friends and family.*
- ☞ *When you are honest, people are more likely to give you the benefit of the doubt.*

People generally know when they meet an honest and trustworthy person. They see it in their eyes and face. They feel it in their presence. This can go a long way when trying to make friends, land good jobs, get a place on a team, and find a person to marry. Everyone would rather be in the company of someone who is honest rather than someone who is dishonest.

Honesty is a big deal, and the payoffs for being an honest person are huge. You might find that the biggest benefit of honesty is the way you feel about yourself. When you know that you are living honestly you will feel better about yourself. Honesty is a choice. If you have been living a dishonest life you can change. It's your choice. Try it for one day, then one week, and then take the challenge for an entire month. Experience the benefits for yourself and see how you feel.

Being Honest with Yourself

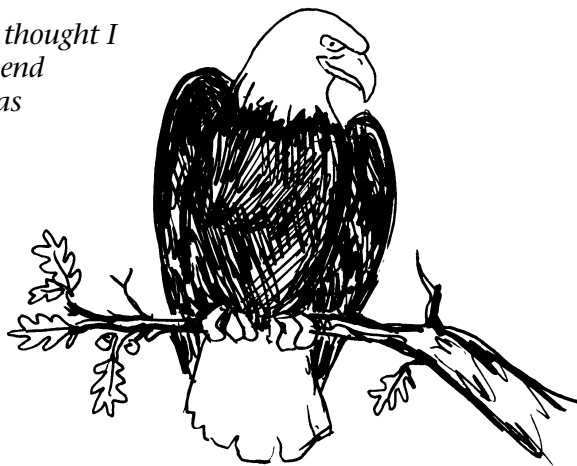
Honest people tend to be honest with themselves. They listen to what is really going on inside them—what they are thinking and feeling and why they behave in the way that they do. Sometimes people are ashamed or afraid of what is within them. They try not to look at themselves because to do so would be too painful. It would also mean having to change, and that is hard. So many people try to pretend that everything is OK and that if problems exist that they are not to blame. How do you feel when you are being honest with yourself?

How People Depend on Honesty

Can you imagine what would happen if everyone was dishonest? The world could not function at all. Here are some examples of things that people depended on:

- ☞ *We made reservations at a hotel for our summer vacation three months in advance. My wife and I were traveling on a very tight budget. I asked if there were any extra charges, aside from the price we agreed on. The hotel manager assured me there weren't. When we went to check out, the bill was nearly twice what I expected. It was really dishonest of them to add all of those charges without warning us.*
- ☞ *I got my hair cut and colored a week before a big interview. It looked really bad. I thought that maybe I was overreacting so I asked my girlfriend what she thought. I was prepared to try to*

fix it before the interview. I thought I looked like a weirdo. My friend assured me that my hair was fine, she even said it was "in." As soon as the interviewer met me she looked at my hair. I could just feel that it was too wild for the job. I didn't get called back. I can't help thinking there is a connection. I wish my friend had told me the truth. I know she was trying to save my feelings.



- ☉ *I had plans to meet my friend for dinner. I was having a lot of trouble at work and needed to talk to him. He called me an hour before we were to get together and cancelled. I ended up going to grab a slice of pizza and see a movie by myself. Wouldn't you know that I bumped into my friend at the movie theater with a girl he had wanted to ask out.*
- ☉ *A few months ago I hired a man to cut my lawn. He accidentally ran over a \$25.00 garden hose and ruined it. I am sure he saw the damage to the hose because he picked it up and moved it out of the way after he ran over it. He never mentioned it to me, and hinted that I should pay him more than we agreed. I don't care about the hose half as much as I care about his deceitfulness. He was so dishonest. I will never hire him again!*

Interview Question: Do You Think Honesty is Important?

We interviewed several students to find out how they felt about honesty, here is what they said when asked: Do you think that honesty is important?

It's very important. I respect it when someone has enough honesty to tell you if they don't like what you have been doing, or if they think you have been doing a great job. I can understand a person keeping secrets away from me if they don't really know me, but I appreciate people who are open. I feel that most people are trustworthy.

Abby, 13

Yes, because if you can't trust a person you can't do anything with a person. If you want to trust them with something you can't.

Ned, 12

Not only is honesty important in other people but I think it's really important that people know you are honest. One time my friend's mother actually accused me of stealing something from them. I was so angry and embarrassed that she didn't trust me. It was an awful feeling to have someone think I was dishonest even though I wasn't. So, I would say honesty is important no matter how you look at it.

Vicki, 12



Journal

Look at the above examples of white lies and withholding the truth. Do you think that any of the lies are acceptable to tell people? If so, why? Try to imagine how you would feel if you were the person on the other end.



To Do

1. Make a list of things people usually lie about. Why do people lie about these things? What are the short-term and the long-term consequences of telling the kinds of lies that you have listed and discussed?
2. Many people do not like themselves the way they are. To make other people like them more they exaggerate. They add untrue details to stories or they outright lie about things they have said and done. If you had a friend who had the habit of doing this, how would you try to help your friend realize he didn't need to exaggerate or make things up?
3. In the following sticky situations, discuss with your classmates what you think you should do.
 - a. *Your mother has invited your cousin to your house for the weekend and expects you to entertain him. You do not like your cousin very much. He annoys you and you would rather not be around him. You know that you could get away from the responsibility of entertaining your cousin if you told your mother you had a big math exam on Monday and that you had to go to your friend's house to study. You don't have a math test but rather a quiz that you weren't planning on*

studying for. Would this be dishonest?

b. You see a bag on the street on your way to school. You do not see anyone else around. You pick it up and look inside.

"Wow!" you gasp in surprise. Inside the bag is a brand new walkman. You have been wanting a walkman, but you never have enough money to buy one. Just as you finish putting the bag inside your own bag a young man, looking very upset, comes running around the corner. He says, "My sister was just carrying an important bag, but dropped it when a big dog started to chase her. Can you help me? Did you see the bag? Did you see anyone else walking here?" You know you should give it back, but you are embarrassed because it is already snugly in your own backpack. What should you do?

Key Ideas

- ☉ People who are honest create a world that is easier for them to live in. They do not have to constantly cover up their lies.
- ☉ Honesty is the foundation of a good life.



**No one has a good enough memory
to make a successful liar.**

Abraham Lincoln

