

Trust Based Relational Intervention

TBRI in Action

Liar, Liar Pants on Fire!

Teaching Truthfulness To Kids from Hard Places

Developed by Brenda Ursel, M.S., TBRI Educator

TBRI® is an attachment-based, evidence-based, and trauma-informed intervention that is designed to meet the complex needs of vulnerable children. TBRI uses Empowering Principles to address physical needs, Connecting Principles for attachment and Correcting Principles to disarm fear-based behaviors.



Note: In this TBRI video Clip Dr. Purvis uses biblical references and stories to illustrate a principle of Trust Based Relational Intervention. TBRI is NOT a faith based approach but one that is solidly grounded in neuroscience and brain based research.



"I Didn't Eat the Brownie" Understanding Primary Process of Lying

There is a developmental stage where children ages 4-6 explore the perimeters of the truth. We have all seen the videos of the preschooler with her fingers in the brownie pan, insisting that she did not eat any brownies. While this behavior may be cute for a toddler, the same crazy lying in older youth strikes terror into the hearts of parents. We know that without honesty there can be no trust and without trust, the relationship will be tumultuous at best. As parents, we want more for our children. We want a child who is honest, with whom we can build a strong, connected relationship. So when our child lies, it is easy to react in anger. When a youth is caught in a crazy lie, (like the brownie example) and he is confronted with anger, and accusation he will clamp down on his lie with the tenacity of a pit bull. The harder the parent pushes the more the youth resists. Despite convicting evidence, he will not let go of his "story". As you might guess, it doesn't end well for parent or child.

What Can We Do? Let's Start with You!

STAY CALM and Breathe

When dealing with a lying youth, this is easier said than done. If there is one behavior that can tempt a TBRI parent to revert back to a crime and punishment mindset, this would be it! So what can we do?

Let's take a moment to think about why it is so hard to stay calm when faced with a lying child. Why is it a trigger for you? Is it because your child must believe you to be a moron to think for a moment that you would believe her crazy whopper of a story? Are you offended? Do you feel indignant? Disrespected? Unappreciated? Are you worrying that your child is becoming ungrateful and spoiled? Are you embarrassed or fearful that this may develop into a lifelong character issue?

These thoughts, normal as they are, will fuel an angry, reactive response that will only serve to escalate the problem. So our first course of action is to control our thoughts.

Remember:

- All children explore the parameters of the truth.
- Primary process lying is a developmental stage.
- Trauma can delay or prolong this stage.
- It is not personal. It is not about you.
- You can develop and practice a parental stay calm plan.
- It is not always necessary for the child to admit the truth.

1. Model Truthfulness

Actions Speak Louder than Words

Talk is cheap, and for kids whose lives are filled with hollow words and empty promises, it holds little value. Our kids are watching us. We can't just talk about honesty and integrity; we have to model it in our everyday life. As parents, we need to live out the scripts that we teach and practice with our kiddos, especially our teenagers. That means living a life of honesty and integrity.

When someone you don't want to talk to is on the phone, do you tell your child to "tell them your not home?" Do your children hear you call in sick to work, when you feel fine? Do you believe that little white lies are okay? If so, how do you distinguish between a little white lie and huge, destructive whopper? Also you have to be prepared to explain why sometimes lying is okay and sometimes it is not.

2. Determine what purpose the lie serves

A. Is the youth afraid of punishment or reactivity of a parent?

- This speaks to the earlier section, *Stay Calm and Breathe*. Parents, find your favorite self calming tool and practice it. A child won't tell you the truth if they are afraid of your reaction.

B. Are they lying to get a need met?

- The answer to this requires a little more detective work on the part of the parent. Remember the first line of defense, Think F.A.S.T? Is this a food, activity, sensory, or issue with being tired, thirsty or is this during a transition? If so, then give voice to and help the youth meet the underlying need.
- The other factor that motivates lying is relational. Let me explain. A child may lie for attention or as a way to fit in with his/her peers or because of peer pressure. Our children often experience delays in their social and emotional maturity. This makes them especially susceptible to peer influences and doing anything to fit in.
- **For example:** A youth who is stealing make up to use at school and lies about it or a teenager who repeatedly steals cell phones from others so he is not the only one in his peer group without one.

C. In the past, did lying keep them from being abused, hurt or bullied?

- In this situation, parents need to be proactive with their words and actions to show the youth that they will not be hurt for telling the truth. Parents must explain and have visuals to teach the child what will happen when they get into trouble. Parents also need to be prepared to be tested. Some children purposely misbehave to find out what the adult does when they are angry. Scripts can be used to help with this. Developing your own "If then" poster can also be helpful.

D. Birth Family History:

- Believe it or not, not all families find virtue in honesty. Your child may have been taught and/or encouraged to lie. These children do not see lying as a problem or bad and may seem confused that you do. To the youth, lying is how life is done.

Teaching Honest Communication with Trust & Integrity

Balancing Structure and Nurture:

As Dr. Purvis teaches, parents need to address lying with balance and insight. We need to communicate to the youth that we are on their team to help them learn a better way. We need to be careful not to have "Aha, I caught you now" mentality.

Here are some scripts you can use with your youth when they lie to you.

- *Is that real or pretend?*
- Respond with *Why don't you think about that one and try again?*
- If they persist, say *Come sit with me for a few minutes to think about that one.* Sit quietly with the youth.
- Ask them, *what would happen if you told the truth?* If they say they don't know, give suggestions. *Will I still be your mom? Will I still love you? Will you still be safe?* Then give them the answer, YES!
- If you have already set the consequences **proactively**, you can remind them of what happens when they lie. Explain, there will be consequences for behavior, but lying makes for bigger consequences.
- Respond with *Hmmm... I am not sure about that. Want to try again, Bud?*

Proactive Scripts and Activities:

- *Tell the truth.*
- *Ask, don't sneak.*
- *Ask, don't steal.*
- *Trust - Don't Take. (Mommy and Daddy will give you good things.)*
- Explain what consequences will be ahead of time.
- Explain positive and negative consequences of lying.
- Give them the power to choose lying or telling the truth. (As parents we can't stop them from lying but we don't protect them from the consequences either.)
- Thank them when they tell you the truth when it is hard. Mark the behavior.

Teaching with Books and Movies:

- Lying Up a Storm *Julia Cook*
- The Little Boy Who Cried Wolf
- Big Fat Liar (Movie)
- What Would Danny Do? *Ganit and Adir Levy*
- What Would You Do? In a Jar
- If You Had to Choose, What Would You Do? *Sandra Mcleod Humphrey*
- That Rule Doesn't Apply to Me! *Julia Cook*
- Howard B. Wigglebottom and the Monkey on His Back: A Tale About Telling the Truth *Howard Binkow*
- Mama Do You Love Me? Book- *Barbara M. Jooss*
- I Love You Stinky Face- *Lisa McCourt*