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Sesame Family Newsletter

March 5, 2009

The Truth About Lying

by Jordan D. Brown

A dad helps his daughter discover the nuances of truth telling.

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Featuring:

Flushed with Embarrassment?
Keeping the Truth to Yourself
Santa Claus, The Tooth Fairy,
and Co.



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Identify shapes with Big Bird.
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Parent Survey

The parenting section of the Sesame Street website will soon have a new focus, providing you with all the media (videos, games, activities, and articles) you need to navigate your child's milestones.

Help us make the Sesame Street site even better for your child! Take our survey and tell us what you think.

[Take the Survey](#)

FLUSHED WITH EMBARRASSMENT?

Whenever my daughter Olivia emerges from the bathroom, I gently ask, "Did you remember to flush and wash your hands?" She usually answers, "Yes!" and sometimes give me a look, adding, "You DON'T have to remind me, Daddy!"

And sometimes, she's actually telling the truth.

Most of the time, though, Olivia just says what she thinks I want to hear, eager to get on with the business of being a curious 4-year-old. My response varies. Sometimes I quickly flush the toilet myself, and then ask Olivia to wash up "again" before I give her a snack. Other times, I encourage her to face the facts in a playful way.



[ACCIDENTS HAPPEN](#)

Telling the truth about breaking a window.

"Hmm..." I might say. "I thought you flushed and washed, too." I wonder why there's still pee and toilet paper in the bowl. Then, with wide eyes, I melodramatically say, "It's a mystery." She usually shrugs her shoulders, smiles, and tells me, "Well, I guess you better flush it!" I sometimes insist that she finish the job, but other times I let it slide. I learned long ago that picking my battles is one of the keys to successful parenting. I even let Olivia know that she's not alone, confessing that, from time to time, I too forget to flush.

[NOODLES & NEDD: AIRPLANE FUN](#)

Noodles breaks Nedd's model airplane.

As you probably have discovered, young children are fond of saying "I didn't do it!" even when it is clear that they did. Not too long ago, for instance, I noticed some pencil marks on our kitchen table. Upon closer inspection, I saw that the marks were the letters "O L I V I A" -- written in preschooler handwriting. My first two thoughts were, "Wow, her handwriting is getting really good!" and "Phew! She didn't use permanent marker." Later that day, I brought Olivia over to the table to ask her why she wrote on it. At first, she started to deny it, but seeing as it was her name (and, frankly, she was proud of her work) she responded, "Sorry!" I gave her an eraser, so that she could help clean up this mistake. Then I gave her some paper so she could demonstrate again how well she could write her name.

In my experience, children are much more likely to tell the truth about their mistakes when goofs and screw-ups are considered "no biggie," and their honesty is rewarded. I also make it a habit to tell my children when I've done something klutzy or careless. The only downside to doing this is that my kids then tease me mercilessly about my "dumb" mistakes. Last week, for example, Olivia announced to our neighbors, "Daddy, remember the time you washed your white underpants with that red blanket and your underpants turned pink!"

KEEPING THE TRUTH TO YOURSELF

As you've no doubt noticed, young children rarely censor their observations. When Olivia was about 3, I remember her asking me in a loud voice in the supermarket checkout line, "Look, Daddy! Why does that fat man have such a BIG nose?" I was mortified.

Fortunately, the man in question had a good sense of humor. He came over to Olivia, smiled, and playfully answered, "The better to smell with, my dear!" After we left the supermarket, I tried to explain to Olivia that sometimes you don't need to say aloud what you are thinking, even if it is honest. Sometimes not hurting someone's feelings is more important than saying the truth aloud.

As a little game, I had Olivia imagine that I was wearing a very ugly hat, and I asked, "What do you think of my hat?" I told her there were different ways she could respond. One way would be to say, "Yuck! That hat is the ugliest thing I've ever seen!" Another was, "Wow! That hat is soooo beautiful. I wish I had one just like it!" And a third way, "I've never seen a hat like that! It looks nice." We discussed how I might feel upon hearing each of these responses.



[HANDLING DELICATE OR HURTFUL SITUATIONS](#)

How to handle name calling, insensitive questions, and more.

SANTA CLAUS, THE TOOTH FAIRY, AND CO.

While most parents put a premium on honesty with their kids, this doesn't mean that 100% truthfulness is always the way to go. Take Santa Claus or the Tooth Fairy, for example. Some parents believe that keeping these fictional characters alive for their kids is an act of love and a way to spark their imaginations. Other parents make a point of telling their kids the truth, no matter what the outcome. Still other parents find an interesting middle ground. A mother of a bright 10-year-old girl named Rose recently told me that her daughter asked if Santa Claus was real or not. Her response was, "Rose, I choose to believe!" and left it at that. I've heard other amusing stories about children who don't dare ask about Santa's existence for fear that they won't get presents if they question the "truth."

Sometimes young children ask tough questions such as, "Where do babies come from?" "Mommy, are you going to die?" and "How come Hannah's daddy doesn't live with her mom?" Of course, there are no easy answers. But child development experts recommend that you always begin by finding out what



[HOW TO HANDLE YOUR CHILD'S QUESTIONS](#)

What to do when children ask endless, tricky questions.

the child knows already. You might respond with the ever-popular question, "What do YOU think?" It's also helpful to remember that answers can be brief and vague. Kids can always ask follow-up questions when they get older.

Good luck helping your kids navigate the murky waters of truth and lying.

Jordan D. Brown
Sesame Workshop

WEEKLY TRIVIA

True or false? Ernie and Bert were named for the policeman and the taxicab driver in the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*.

Answer: False. Sesame writers insist it's just a coincidence. Of course, we don't have to believe them.

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP



Sesame Workshop is a nonprofit educational organization making a meaningful difference in children's lives around the world. Founded in 1968, the Workshop changed television forever with the legendary *Sesame Street*. Today, the Workshop continues to innovate on behalf of children in 120 countries, using its proprietary research methodology to ensure its programs and products are engaging and enriching. Sesame Workshop is behind award-winning programs like *Dragon Tales* and *Sagwa, The Chinese Siamese Cat, Pinky Dinky Doo* and ground breaking multimedia productions in South Africa, Egypt and Russia. As a nonprofit, Sesame Workshop puts the proceeds it receives from sales of *Sesame Street*, *Dragon Tales* and *Sagwa* products right back into its educational projects for children around the world. Find the Workshop online at www.sesameworkshop.org.

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