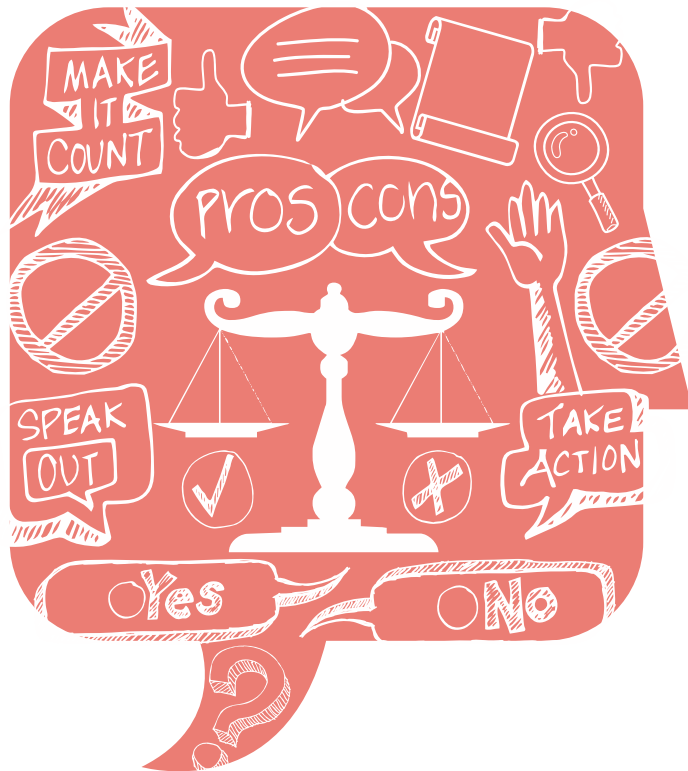


This week's issue:

WHEN IS IT OKAY TO LIE?

We all know the story about George Washington's honesty. As a little boy George chopped down a cherry tree with his shiny new axe. When confronted by his father he immediately admitted his guilt, stating, "I cannot tell a lie." However, many historians believe this never happened, so the tale itself is a lie!

Children are often told, "Honesty is the best policy." They are taught that lying is highly **unethical**. Once someone **conceives** of you as a liar, trust may be permanently lost. Everything you say to that person is suspect. Lying is not just unethical; it is also bad for your reputation.

Nonetheless, research shows that people lie frequently, and that about half of lies are not **detected**. What do you do if a friend asks if you like her new haircut, and you don't? What if your mom spends hours cooking and then you hate the meal? Many people think that lying may be ethical if it protects people's feelings. These "social lies" are **rationalized** as polite.

Sometimes historical truth is suppressed or twisted to support national pride. For example, Christopher Columbus engaged in many brutal practices toward Native Americans, but U.S. history portrays him as a hero for "discovering America." President Bush justified the 2003 war with Iraq by saying that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. No such weapons were ever found. Misrepresentations like these aim to simplify history for young children and keep us patriotic and ready to serve our country.

Sometimes people lie to **benefit** themselves. Denying that you wrote a note on the bathroom wall when you really did is unethical, but lying to protect your classmate's feelings is friendly and polite. It seems that our ideas about lying are flexible, and depend on who benefits from the lie.

Imagine that your friend Jared showed you a hunting knife that his grandfather had given him. You promised not to tell anyone he had it, because knives aren't allowed at school. You agreed to keep his secret because you knew how proud the knife made him. However, later the knife was found on the playground. Your teacher asked you, "Do you know whose knife this is?" How would you answer? Would you lie to protect your friend? Or would you tell your teacher, which means you lied to Jared about keeping his secret? When is it okay to lie?

WHEN IS IT OKAY TO LIE?



conceive | unethical | benefit | detect | rationalize

USE THE FOCUS WORDS *and alternate parts of speech

conceive (*verb*) to think of or form an idea of something

➞ **Sample Sentence:** Once someone **conceives** of you as a liar, trust may be permanently lost.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** How do you **conceive** of a person who has lied to you?

unethical (*adjective*) incorrect by moral standards

➞ **Sample Sentence:** Children are often told that “honesty is the best policy” and that lying is highly **unethical**.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Is it ethical or **unethical** to lie about information that might hurt a friend’s feelings?

benefit (*verb*) to help; to receive a good result

➞ **Sample Sentence:** Sometimes people lie to **benefit** themselves.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** What can middle school students do to **benefit** the community?

***benefit** (*noun*) a good result; an advantage

➞ **Sample Sentence:** Many doctors tell their patients about the **benefits** of exercise and a healthy diet.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** What are some of the **benefits** of bilingualism?

detect (*verb*) to discover or identify

➞ **Sample Sentence:** Research shows that about half of lies are not **detected**.

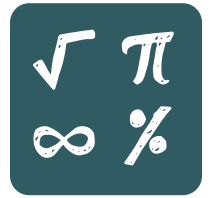
🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** What strategies do you use to **detect** a lie?

rationalize (*verb*) to explain or justify

➞ **Sample Sentence:** “Social lies” are **rationalized** as necessary for politeness.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** How can someone **rationalize** spending a whole paycheck on a popular brand of shoes?

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DO THE MATH

Option 1: Most people understand that lying is **unethical**, but that doesn't stop them from **rationalizing** the lies they tell. One quarter of lies are told for someone else's **benefit**, so people **conceive** of these lies as polite rather than harmful. Some experts estimate that we are lied to almost 200 times per day. Of all the lies you are told in a day, about how many are for your **benefit**?

- A. 50
- B. 75
- C. 100
- D. 125

Option 2: It can be difficult to **conceive** of the number of lies we hear every day. And most of the time, we don't even notice. But experts say people can **benefit** from learning to recognize verbal cues and nonverbal behaviors that suggest a person is lying. Most people can recognize lies about half of the time. By using strategies, people can improve their lie **detecting** abilities by approximately 60%. After training, what percentage of lies will they be able to **detect**?

 **Discussion Question:** Children begin lying at an early age. Scientists say this behavior is part of normal brain development. When children lie, they are demonstrating higher-level thinking, which will **benefit** them in social interaction. Still, experts recommend that parents teach their children that lying is **unethical**. When parents **detect** a lie, experts recommend taking the opportunity to discuss the importance of honesty. Think of a time when a parent caught you lying. How did you try to **rationalize** your behavior?

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THINK SCIENTIFICALLY

Ms. Kahn’s class is talking about when it is and is not okay to lie. “I think it’s always better to tell the truth,” says Marian. “It’s the right thing to do, and it just makes life simpler—you don’t have to **rationalize** your dishonesty or keep track of what you told somebody.”

“It’s **unethical** to lie about important things,” says Aliyah. “But I think some little lies can make things simpler and easier. For example, if someone asked you whether you liked their new shoes or something, and you didn’t, what would be the **benefit** of telling the truth?”

“Wait,” says Jamal, “this morning you told me you liked my new shoes. I think I **detect** a lie.”

“I can’t **conceive** of how you could tell if someone were lying,” says Marian. “I don’t think it’s that easy. For example, if I say ‘I love snack food’ and ‘I hate potato chips,’ how would you know which was true?”

“That would be difficult to say, since we can’t tell by looking,” says Ms. Khan.

“But don’t some people use body language to **detect** lies?” says Jamal. “I heard that people often break eye contact when they tell a lie.”

“You just gave me a great idea, Jamal,” says Ms. Kahn. “Let’s do an experiment to see if we can **detect** each other’s lies!”

Question: Can you **detect** when a classmate is lying?

Pair up with a classmate, and take turns doing the following:

Step 1: Write down three statements about yourself, two of them true and the other one false. Try to make all three of them believable.

- _____
- _____
- _____

Step 2: Read all three statements to your partner in random order, but don’t tell them which one is a lie. Try to read them all the same way so all are equally believable.

Step 3: Ask them if they could **detect** when you were reading the false statement about yourself. If they guess correctly, ask them how they knew you were lying.

 What could be some **benefits** and some **disadvantages** of being able to **detect** every lie that someone tells you?

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TAKE A STAND



Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

conceive | unethical | benefit | detect | rationalize
