
Pinocchio's child: do we socialize our children to become liars?

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Lying is generally viewed as something negative. The commandment "thou shalt not lie" is part of various world religions. But lying is not as black and white as you initially think. We regularly lie for sake of others, out of love, friendship, or compassion. About 1 in 3 people lie every day. And parents are no exception international research shows that as many as 90% of parents lie to their child. Parents regularly tell little lies, for example claiming that the pasta sauce contains no vegetables or threatening the police if a child does not want to listen. But lies are also told about more serious themes: a deceased hamster is secretly replaced with a comparable one or parents disguise their struggle with psychiatric problems.

This lecture will discuss in more detail the how and why of parents lying to children. What do parents lie about and what are their motives? Is it bad to lie or is it sometimes better not to burden children with the truth? And what effect does lying have on the children and the parents themselves? Do we socialize our children to become liars? And if so, is that a bad thing? In my story I consider the question of how lying by parents fits into today's times and the relevance of this subject for educators and caregivers. I will illustrate the talk with examples from the EU-funded Fami-LIES project, a study on the early roots of lying in families.

Short bio

Dr. Rianne Kok is associate professor at the Department of Psychology, Education and Child Studies of Erasmus University Rotterdam. Her research is driven by the question why some children struggle more than others to act according to the social norms and values of their family, school, and society. Moreover, she is a passionate university teacher who aims to inspire and engage students to become critical and empathic thinkers.