

It will be seen at a glance how important it is that children be trained to speak the truth. Only a clear understanding of the child's inclinations, peculiarities and capacities will enable parents and teachers to devise the best plans and means for its progress. For if a child is accustomed to lie, many other evil thoughts and habits may hide themselves behind that screen, and thus escape being observed or checked. It is still worse when a spoken lie has been previously matured, when, in telling it, the child is perfectly at ease and confident of success. In such a case, the whole position of those who educate, and of him who is to be educated, is changed; the child has gained a superiority over parents and teachers, and the latter become a plaything in the hands of the former.

The question now comes—*What is the best method of training children to speak the truth? and the nearest answer is:*

*First. Present us much as possible the first lie.* It is natural for man to be in harmony with himself, to act as a unit, to speak and appear just as he feels and thinks. To dissolve this union of inward reality and outward appearance is unnatural, and can be accomplished only by a great effort. The first lie is always spoken with a trembling voice, undecided appearance, and a downcast eye. But when the strong fortification of truth is once taken, the good protecting angel of innocence recedes, and every subsequent lie is uttered with less effort and accompanied by less remorse. The rule just given is applicable to many cases which are often overlooked and still more frequently not sufficiently observed.

*Never consider that a lie which was not intended for one.* Little children up to five years of age have lessons to learn, which are harder, greater, and more important than adults usually imagine. The proper use of the five senses, a discrimination of the impressions thus made upon their minds, and a true expression of their ideas through the organs of speech in words, which are arbitrarily chosen, and not at all connected with the thing observed or the thought created—this is the task assigned to early childhood. Happily, children perform it most cheerfully. They learn language in a playful way. They never tell a lie. Their talking is only loud thinking; the first half of a thought affirms what the second denies. They will talk even what would appear plain nonsense to an adult, simply because they like to hear their own voices. They will repeat words many times and form strange combinations. All such talking is mechanical exercise of the organs of speech, or repetition of what they have heard, and therefore without meaning or significance. When children begin to utter connected thoughts, a new difficulty arises in *mistaking the true meaning of words*, and from ignorance of *grammatical construction*. Mistakes are made with regard to number, tense, or person; particles which express expansion or limitation, affirmation or negation, are used in the wrong way; the degrees of comparison are disregarded, or a part is taken for the whole, or *vice versa*. The child may have misunderstood a whole question, or confined his attention only to the last words. In each of these and many other cases, the answer or statement of the child may be wrong in the eyes of an adult, and yet perfectly true within the limited sphere of a child under eight years of age.

Another cause which makes children often appear as if they deviated from truth, is their *active imagination*. They will imitate the doings of adults, with whom they come in contact, and play schoolmaster, carpenter, auctioneer, or soldier. They will hold town meetings, capture a thief, or arrange a funeral procession. They expect others to feel and act just as they do themselves. They breathe life into inanimate things around them. Their dolls are living babies, eating, drinking, sleeping, and crying; a stick becomes a fast-running horse, and a paper boat carries a whole army of living soldiers.

They make no careful discrimination between past, present, and future. An expected pleasure is to them a present reality, and an alarm or a punishment they have met with in the past, will be experienced anew with the original intensity as often as they are reminded of it. Their hours and weeks are long or short, according to their feeling. All their experience and knowledge is the material with which they color their past trials or joys, magnify present impressions, and form new combinations, or build castles in the air. Their minds are intensely active day and night. They live in dreams when waking, and are awakened by dreams when asleep. Up to a certain period they cannot distinguish things as they are, from the creations of their fancy, and are therefore liable to be misunderstood.

It is not sufficient, however, *not to accuse the child of a lie*, when it is actually innocent; we must as much as possible *remove all temptation to tell a lie*.

If we could see clearly how our mental and moral faculties are called forth and developed by circumstances and events, we should

meet many a case, where adults caused a child to tell what was known to be untrue, and then punished it for it. If it is known with certainty that something wrong has been committed, parents or teachers ought first to ascertain whether the child knew the act to be wrong or not. In the latter case only proper instruction and advice are needed; anything beyond that is of evil. But if the child is conscious of having done wrong, it should be met with a firm accusation which would not leave the least room even for the thought of a denial. If it be not fairly ascertained that the child did wrong, a skilful way of catechizing has been found the best method of getting at the truth. The questions ought to be put calmly, kindly, and in such a succession that the child does not see the connection between its answers and their consequences. After some facts are established, the child's true position is often clearly seen. This method, however, requires practice, skill, and, above all, an earnest zeal to benefit the child, whatever the cost may be. Young parents and teachers are apt to fail in these attempts. They are either so fond of their charge as to overlook many a case which ought to be investigated, or have not time and patience enough to arrive at a satisfactory result. Sufficient time must also be given to the child to consider fully the true meaning of the questions, or else an inconsiderate answer may be given in haste. If cases occur where, in all probability, the first lie may be expected, it is preferable not to mention such a case at all. The little child must be kept as long as can be in the belief that the parent or teacher knows the truth and is free from error.

*Never advise or command a child to lie.* This point is seldom in all its bearings strictly observed. Children are sometimes made to ask one's pardon, when they do not see anything wrong in their doings; or they are commanded to show signs of affection to persons whom they do not like; or they are taught to learn and utter complimentary phrases, which they feel to be but words without meaning; or they are compelled to speak words of thanks after punishment, when they feel anything but thankfulness. A mother wishes to be undisturbed, and advises her daughter to tell callers that she is not at home. A member of the family is to be surprised with a present. The child has heard of it, but is told to deny all knowledge about it, if it should be questioned. An adult play with children, hides himself and asks some of them not to betray to the others where he is hidden; not to mention cases of a grosser kind which occur in the lower classes of society, where the division line between truth and falsehood is almost invisible.

*Secondly. When a lie has been told, find out its motive and treat the child accordingly.* The real merit of a deed lies neither in its appearance nor in its subsequent consequences, but only in its motives. To read these in the hearts of the pupils is one of the highest duties of all those who have to deal with children; and to purify these is to elevate their moral standard most effectually. The various motives which induce children to lie may be brought in three groups,—indiscretion, fear, and desire.

Lies of *indiscretion* are committed without forethought or plan. They may occur in conversation. The child, in talking with an adult, expresses his loose ideas in words still less precise than his thoughts, and thus an original misunderstanding may cause the reproach of a lie. The child may be asked to testify as a witness before the family circle, to give advice to his playmate in a critical position, or to repeat a story. In these, as well as other cases, the child may have received a wrong impression, or his memory may be at fault, or his feelings and imagination may be wrought up to such a pitch, that he is incapable at the time to discriminate between appearance and reality. What is to be done in such a case? Sometimes the simple advice not to make fun, but to speak in earnest, may be of good effect; at other times it may be well to point out some of the contradictions of the statement, and request a correction of the mistakes. Or if the habit of not being careful enough continues, the child may be told that it will fall in disrepute, as one who does not adhere to truth. Good advice, instruction, and encouragement are all that is needed to counteract and prevent lies of this kind.

Another potent cause of lies is *fear*. A lie of fear is always committed when something has been done which the child knew to be wrong. The evil deed lies behind—confrontation and detection before him. Conscience tells him that punishment must follow, and imagination condenses and magnifies such punishment beyond proper limits. In the pressure of the moment there seems to be but one way of escaping, and, with a trembling voice and downcast eye, the deed done is denied. In many of these cases parents are perhaps as guilty as their children. Their look, voice and appearance magnify the importance of the deed, and the degree of punishment. They will even get into a passion, and speak words or commit deeds, worse than those which they pretend to punish.