

Is Lying a Problem for You?

Objective

To reduce lying by identifying alternatives to this behavior.

What to Know

Everyone lies occasionally, from small lies to spare someone's feelings to attempts to manipulate or mislead. But lying can have serious consequences, including undermining others' trust, damaging relationships, and negatively impacting your personal life. If lying has become a habit, you might want to break this pattern and be more truthful moving forward. Here are some signs you might have a problem with lying.

- You lie for no justifiable reason.
- You excuse your lying, believing you are protecting others.
- You fabricate stories to hide the truth.
- Others have commented about your lies.
- Other people no longer trust the things you say.
- You feel like no one knows the "real" you.
- Lying has led to serious consequences such as losing relationships, jobs, or other opportunities.

It might not be easy to stop the pattern of lying, and it might take time, but your desire to stop can be enough to help you break the habit. Here are some helpful suggestions.

1. Stop justifying dishonesty. Even though everyone lies from time to time, most people are generally truthful and honest. Research has found that most people lie once or twice per day, but there is a small percentage of people who lie far more than average. So, if you lie more than the average person, dishonesty might negatively affect your life.

2. Understand why you lie. Sometimes lying is a deliberate attempt to manipulate others. In other cases, it might be a way to avoid hurt feelings.

3. Consider how lying is affecting your life. Be honest with yourself about how lying is affecting your life and other people. If you lie for personal gain or to manipulate others, you have likely experienced a decline in the quality of your relationships. When you understand the harm that lying can do, you might be less likely to lie.

4. Reflect on the consequences. There are certain situations where it is understandable to withhold the truth or lie. But even the most well-intentioned lies have consequences. Even when you lie to spare someone's feelings, you make assumptions about what you think they want to hear.

5. Prioritize your relationships. Lying damages trust and people feel they cannot rely on you to be truthful. It can be hard – if not impossible – to rebuild trust.

6. Decrease stress and enhance your health. Lying might quickly solve a problem but maintaining the lie can be stressful and lead to long-lasting problems. Small lies can snowball and grow bigger than you intended. Research suggests that lying takes a serious toll on your wellbeing, and people who decrease their lying experienced improvements in their health.

7. Practice being authentic. You might lie because you think revealing your feelings about something will lead to rejection. But when you hide what you really think or feel, people never get to know the “real” you. By being honest and vulnerable, you can be who you truly are without feeling the need to hide. Being dishonest makes it harder to form meaningful connections with others.

8. Consider the impact. Just because others may not immediately discover that you lied to them, it does not mean your deception will not hurt them. When they find out, they may feel hurt, manipulated, exploited, or betrayed.

9. Find alternatives. Identify the situations where you might be tempted to lie and think of alternatives. What can you do instead of lying?

10. Start small. Think of one situation where you are likely to lie and focus on changing that behavior.

11. Be kind and tactful. Consider how you can share your thoughts and feelings in a way that will not hurt others. Honest feedback does not have to be hurtful.

12. Practice setting and maintaining your boundaries. You are more likely to lie if you have a hard time setting boundaries. It is not always easy to say no but being more assertive and clearly expressing your needs can help you communicate what is best for you. For example, you might say, “I can’t take on more work this week because I need to focus on the tasks I already have, but I’d be happy to help out next week.”

13. Write it down. If sharing the truth out loud is hard, write down your thoughts and feelings and share them in a letter, email, or text message.

14. Avoid sharing everything. You can tell the truth without sharing everything. You might say, “I’m not comfortable sharing that.” This allows you to be honest about your feelings without lying.

15. Change the subject. If you do not want to share information, shift the topic of conversation to something else rather than lying.

16. Be patient. Changing a habit takes time, so it can be helpful to plan how you are going to overcome this behavior.

17. Seek help. If you are struggling to stop lying or if you feel it is out of control, consider talking to a mental health professional. If lying has affected your close relationships, you might consider couples counseling, family therapy, or group therapy.

What to Do

Why do you think you developed the habit of lying?

How is lying affecting your life?

Write down some consequences you have experienced as a result of lying.

What can you do in place of lying? Be specific.

The next time you find yourself lying, stop and pay attention to your triggers. Ask yourself the following questions.

- Where am I?
- Who am I with?
- How do I feel?
- Am I lying to make myself feel better or avoid making someone feel bad?

Describe what happened, and your responses to the above questions.

Once you identify some triggers, reflect on them, and think about new ways to respond. For example, if you tend to lie when you are put on the spot, plan possible responses *before* going into situations where you are tempted to lie. What can you do? Be specific.

Think of one situation where you are the most likely to lie, then focus on changing that one behavior. Explain what you will do.

Using the above tips and suggestions, write down steps you will follow to start being more truthful.

Date	Situation/with whom	What did you do?	Outcome

Over the past two weeks, were you able to reduce lying and find alternatives to this behavior? Why or why not?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
 (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
