

The Psychology of Lying

"A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is still putting on its shoes." – Mark Twain



Warm up

- What do you think about the quote above?
- Have you ever told a small lie to avoid trouble? What happened?
- What's the difference between a white lie and other types of lies?
- Can you tell when someone is lying? What are the signs?
- Who do you think lies the most—politicians, salespeople, celebrities, or everyday people?

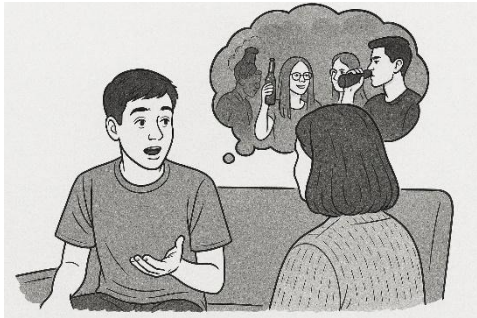


1. Match the different types of lies to their definitions.

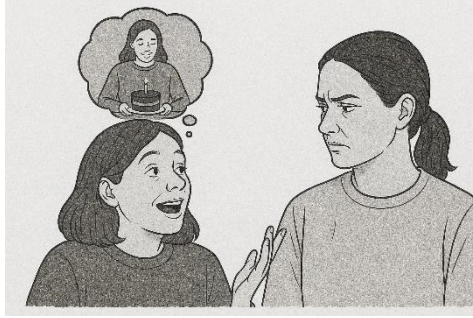
- a. White lies **2**
 - b. Lies of omission **1**
 - c. Blatant lies **5**
 - d. Exaggerations **4**
 - e. Deception in advertising **3**
1. *leaving out key details to mislead someone*
 2. *harmless lies to avoid hurting someone's feelings*
 3. *manipulating information to sell products*
 4. *stretching the truth to make something seem better or worse*
 5. *outright falsehoods, even when the truth is obvious*



2. What type of lies are these?



I was just out with some friends!



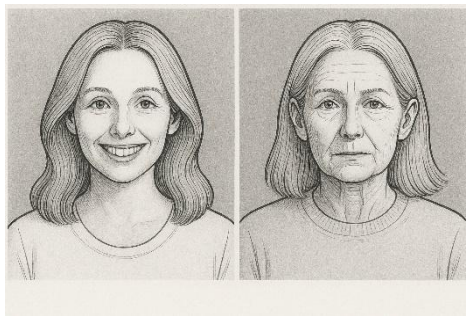
Oh my birthday cake was way bigger than yours. It was huge!



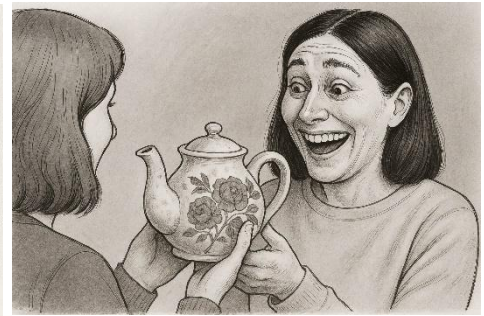
I didn't have any cake!!



I love your new haircut!!



Erase Decades of Wrinkles with One Miracle Cream!



Oh wow! I love it!

- Have you ever told a lie like any of these or had someone lie to you in a similar way?
- Which type of lie do you think people tell most often? *Why do you think that is?*
- Do you think any of these lies make someone a bad person?



3. With a partner read these facts about lying. One of them is FALSE! Can you spot the lie?

- 🧠 On average, people hear 10-200 lies per day.
- 😬 Lying takes more brainpower than telling the truth.
- 👁️ People who look away while speaking are usually lying. **(FALSE)**
- 👦 Children as young as 3 years old start lying.
- 💡 Polygraph (lie detector) tests are only 50-60% accurate.



4. Read the dialogue out loud with a partner and answer the following questions.

Emma: I don't know why people say lying is always bad. Sometimes, a white lie is necessary.

Liam: Really? A half-truth is still a lie. I think honesty is always the best policy.

Emma: Come on, haven't you ever told a friend they looked great when they didn't? Or said you loved a gift just to avoid hurting someone's feelings?

Liam: Actually, no. I always try to be honest, but in a way that's kind. If my friend asks if their haircut looks good and it doesn't, I'd say something like, "It's not my style, but if you love it, that's what matters." I don't think you have to lie to be nice.

Emma: But what's the harm? A little bending of the truth can make people feel good about themselves.

Liam: I think it's the opposite—it's patronizing. If I lie to "be nice," I'm treating the other person like they can't handle the truth. I'd rather respect them enough to be honest.

Emma: Okay, but what about bigger situations? Imagine your friend is about to go on stage to give a speech, and they ask, "Was my rehearsal terrible?" Would you tell them the truth and make them more nervous?

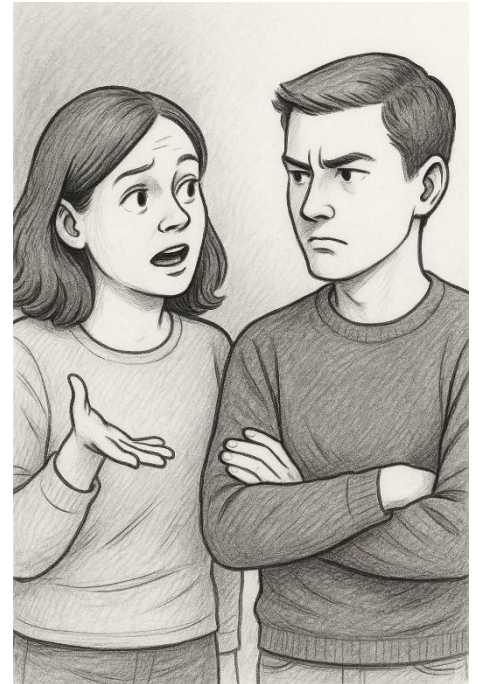
Liam: That's different. I would find something positive to focus on and say, "Your energy was great! Just slow down a little." Encouragement isn't the same as bending the truth.

Emma: I don't know. What about surprises? Like throwing a party for someone, you have to lie to keep it a secret! Or telling kids about Santa Claus?

Liam: I guess those don't really harm anyone. But I still think small lies can easily turn into a web of lies if you're not careful. One minute you're lying about a gift, and the next you're lying about something bigger just because it's easier.

Emma: So you're saying people should never lie?

Liam: I'm saying people should be careful. The more you get comfortable lying, the more natural it becomes, and it's a slippery slope from there.



a. What is Emma's argument about white lies?

Emma believes white lies are sometimes necessary to protect others' feelings and make them feel good about themselves.

b. Why does Liam disagree with her?

Liam thinks even white lies are dishonest and can be patronizing. He believes honesty, when delivered kindly, is more respectful and avoids creating a habit of lying.

c. What examples of white lies do they discuss?

Complimenting a friend's appearance when it's not genuine.; Pretending to like a gift.; Lying to keep a surprise party secret.; Telling kids about Santa Claus.

d. Can you find four idioms in the conversation? What do they mean?

*White lie – A harmless or small lie told to avoid hurting someone's feelings.
Half-truth – A statement that includes some truth but leaves out important details, making it misleading.*

Honesty is the best policy – Being truthful is the best approach in the long run.

Bending the truth – Altering or stretching the truth slightly, often to avoid hurting someone.

Web of lies – A complex and growing set of lies that becomes hard to manage.

Slippery slope – A situation where a small action leads to increasingly negative consequences.

e. Who do you agree with more, Emma or Liam? Why?

Write a short paragraph (3–5 sentences) explaining your opinion. Give reasons and, if possible, an example from your own experience.

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5. Read the newspaper headings below and answer the following questions.

**QUIZ SHOW OUTCOMES
RIGGED BY TELEVISION
PRODUCERS IN
1950s TELEVISION
SCANDAL**

**Emissions Tests
Cheated by
VW in Global
Scandal**

**Charity Cake Scandal
Uncovered in
Influencer's
Marketing Campaign**

**Endorsement Deals
Terminated After
Tiger Woods'
Infidelity Scandal**

- What do you think happened in each story?
- Who do you think was affected by each scandal? (Companies, individuals, the public, etc.)
- What kind of lie or deception was used?
- Which headline sounds the most serious? Which one sounds the most ridiculous or entertaining? Why?



6. In pairs or small groups research and present.

- What really happened?
- Who was involved?
- What were the consequences?
- Your opinion
 - Was the response fair?
 - Could it have been handled differently?


Passive Voice in Headlines

In passive voice, we focus on what happened, not who did it.

 **Active:** The company lied about the product.

 **Passive:** The product was lied about by the company.

We form it with:

 object + be + past participle

(e.g. *The truth was hidden.* / *The scandal was exposed by reporters.*)

Why do newspapers use passive voice?

To focus on the event:

Money Stolen from Charity! (The action matters more than the person.)

To create drama or suspense:

Secret Deal Revealed! (It makes readers curious.)

To avoid blame:

Mistakes Were Made. (No clear subject—often intentional.)

To save space:

Short, punchy headlines are easier to read.



7. Write two misleading or exaggerated newspaper headlines—one based on truth and one completely fabricated.


Examples:

- Chocolate Proven to Boost Intelligence!
- Aliens Have Been Found Living Among Us!

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 **Step 1:** Swap your headlines with a partner. Can they tell if they are misleading?

 **Step 2:** The class votes on the most believable vs. most outrageous headline!



8. The Liar's Dilemma: Deception Role-Play Game

Your group was in a convenience store when a robbery took place. Some of you are truthful witnesses, but *one of you is lying*—they weren't actually there! The class must interrogate and vote on who the liar is.

Step 1: Get Your Role Card

Step 2: The Interrogation: Discuss the robbery and question what happened.

Step 3: The class votes: Who is the liar?

Step 4: Discuss the following questions after the activity

- ◆ What details made someone seem suspicious?
- ◆ What strategies did the liar use to avoid detection?
- ◆ How did the truthful witnesses try to prove they were telling the truth?



9. You're going to watch a video called *The Language of Lying video*¹. Match the vocabulary from the video to their definitions below.

- a. Deception → 2
- b. Subconscious → 4
- c. Reality Monitoring → 1
- d. Linguistic Analysis → 3
- e. Convoluted → 5

1. A mental process that connects experiences with memory and reality.
2. Misleading someone; the act of hiding or twisting the .
3. A scientific method of analyzing how language reflects behavior
4. Thoughts or processes that happen below our awareness
5. Complicated or difficult to follow (often describing language or ideas)

¹<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0-WkpmTPrM>

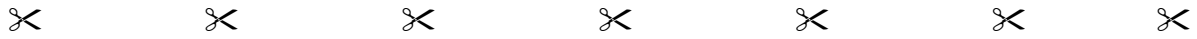
10. Watch the [video](#)² *The Language of Lying* and answer and discuss the following.

1. Most lie detection tools are not reliable enough to be used in *court*.
2. According to the speaker, only about *5%* of our communication is consciously controlled.
3. Liars often use more *convoluted* sentence structures, even though their stories are simpler.
4. What are the four main language patterns liars tend to use, according to the video? *Fewer self-references, more negative language, simpler explanations, more convoluted sentence structure*
5. How did Lance Armstrong's use of personal pronouns change when he told the truth? *Lance Armstrong used more personal pronouns when he told the truth.*
6. What is one clue that showed John Edwards was lying in his earlier statement? *John Edwards avoided using names and used vague terms like "that baby" and "the woman."*
7. Why is it helpful to know how language changes during deception? *It's helpful because it can reveal subconscious clues that someone may be lying.*
8. Do you think these techniques are always reliable? Why or why not?

Role Cards (For 5 Players)

Each player gets a role card with a backstory and details. The liar only knows they weren't there and must make up their story based on what they hear.

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0-WkpmTPrM>



1. Truthful Witness 1: The Shopper

- You were in the store buying a drink when the robbery happened.
- You were near the refrigerator section when you heard shouting.
- You remember the cashier looked panicked and raised their hands.
- The suspect wore a red hoodie and had a black backpack.
- You think it was around 3:10 PM, but you weren't checking the time.
- After the robbery, you saw a blue car speed off outside.



2. Truthful Witness 2: The Friend

- You came to the store with a friend to grab snacks.
- Your friend (another witness) went to get a drink while you looked at candy near the register.
- The suspect had a black backpack and kept pacing near the entrance before the robbery.
- You didn't see exactly what happened at the register, but you heard shouting and saw people freeze.
- The whole thing happened fast—you think it was just after 3 PM.
- You saw someone run outside, but you didn't notice a car.



3. Truthful Witness 3: The Cashier

- You were working the register when the robbery happened.
- The suspect slammed a hand on the counter and demanded money.
- They wore a hoodie (red, maybe burgundy?) and a backpack.
- You didn't see a weapon, but you felt threatened and opened the register.
- You remember a blue car parked outside, but you didn't see if the thief got into it.
- It was definitely around 3:10 PM, because you had just checked the clock.



4. Truthful Witness 4: The Latecomer

- You walked into the store just as the robbery was ending.
- You saw a person in a hoodie run past you out the door.

- People inside looked shocked, and the cashier had their hands up.
- You heard someone say money was taken, but you didn't see the crime itself.
- It was definitely after 3 PM—you checked your phone as you walked in.
- You saw a blue car speed away, but you didn't get a good look at the driver.



5. The Liar 🙄 (The Imposter)

- You were NOT at the store when the robbery happened!
- You have no actual memory of the event—you must make up a story that fits with what others say.
- You know there was a robbery and that people are talking about:
 - A suspect in a hoodie
 - A backpack
 - A blue car
 - A cashier at the register
 - The time being around 3 PM
- You must try to blend in by adding details as others speak—but be careful, because you might contradict someone!