

Life's Building Blocks, Inc.
Making Character Development Fun



Virtue of the Month – Honesty

This is the first month of the Life's Building Blocks Character Development Program.

We know that our character is the sum of all our virtues. We need all those virtues, in the right proportion, to be a good and virtuous person. We also need to practice good character, over and over, until it becomes our nature. We will highlight one of the six cardinal virtues each month, as we send you the products.

The highlighted virtue for this month is **honesty**.

This month, you will be given many opportunities to discuss honesty with your child. In this adult guide, we will discuss the virtue of honesty, share some different ways you can address the subject with your children, and offer some specific questions you can ask your child with respect to this virtue.

In the Honesty activity book, there is a short dialogue between Mr. Lacey, a wise and respected town citizen, and Honest Jake. In this dialogue they discuss Jake's perspective on another classmate who is dishonest and, in general, why people tell lies. Having discussions such as this is an extremely important part of moral and character development. Children need to be able to recognize and reflect on morally important situations in order to develop. For example, suppose your child tells you, "I saw another kid cheat today." This is what we call a "teachable moment." Teachable moments are great opportunities to help children develop their moral reasoning skills.

So how do you take advantage of a teachable moment about cheating and honesty? First, ask your child what he/she thinks about cheating, and if he/she views that action as vitally important. If the child sees it as no big deal and dismisses it, then it will be difficult for the child to learn from it and modify his/her own behavior. But if the child is willing to morally judge that action, saying, for instance, "That was wrong!" then he/she can begin the process of taking

responsibility for his/her own actions. We will be working together to ensure that your child learns, over time, to make those difficult judgments. Don't be afraid to challenge your child with tough questions! But try not to judge your child—this will end the teachable moment.

Reading books together can provide many teachable moments. In the final section of the chapter book for this month, *The Big Mistake*, your child will read a section called "Something to Think About." This is a (moral) summary of the story narrated by Zaki, the "character chameleon." In this section, Zaki talks about different kinds of deception, such as faking it with a facial expression. Zaki also introduces children to the idea of the "little voice" in their heads. This is, of course, their moral conscience. We need to develop that moral conscience in their heads so that they will do the right thing when no one is looking. And if they do the wrong thing, their moral conscience should make them feel bad about that.

Zaki plays the role of the kids' conscience in all of the Life's Building Blocks stories. He reminds the children that they are about to do something wrong by changing colors, as chameleons often do.

What is honesty?

At the simplest level, honesty is being truthful. This includes avoiding lies and all kinds of deception that are considered unfair, such as falsifying data, plagiarizing, or cheating. The virtue of honesty is closely tied to the virtue of integrity, which is not only speaking the truth, but also presenting yourself in a genuine way and taking responsibility for your actions.

Why be honest?

For the purpose of discussing this with our children, the simple answer is this: *so that people will trust you*. It is important for children to understand that with trust comes responsibility and privileges. But once trust is lost, it is extremely hard to earn back. This is because the person who has been deceived will always remember the lie and will suspect all future actions. She will have gotten a glimpse of that person's character and will probably assume that person has a deficit of honesty and integrity. It is an unfortunate but real aspect of human nature that once someone is caught lying, an irretrievable piece of trust is lost. Of course, time, forgiveness, and mercy can restore some of that lost trust, but it is arguable whether or not the liar can ever regain the original level of trust.

Why do people lie?

- We most often lie because of the consequences of telling the truth. Sometimes telling the truth will get us into trouble. Often, we do a "cost-benefit" analysis in our heads and try to determine the probability of getting caught lying versus the benefit of avoiding the truth, and then we decide to lie. We may decide to lie to protect someone's feelings. Or we may lie to avoid punishment. Our children often make a quick cost-benefit determination and decide that lying will yield better results (for them) than telling the truth. (Of course, they often miscalculate the chance of getting caught.)
- We sometimes lie because we trivialize the situation. *It's no big deal*, we tell ourselves. *It's just a little white lie*.
- We frequently rationalize our lies. We convince ourselves that since the ends we are trying to achieve are very important, the "ends justify the means." (This is a very dangerous principle to follow!)
- We lie even though we know it's wrong, because we make a "one time" exception for ourselves. We rationalize, *Just this once . . . I won't do it again*.
- And we often lie simply because we are not prepared for the (moral) decision. Decisions to lie or to tell the truth often come up unexpectedly, and we react without reasoning, often defaulting to self-protection and punishment avoidance. As a man who was convicted of a crime for destroying evidence said, "I didn't wake up that morning knowing I would have to make a life-changing moral decision." He simply wasn't prepared.

One of the purposes of discussing virtues with our children is to *prepare* them for upcoming moral decisions.

The joys of honesty

Clearly, using the reasons for lying that we've just listed can lead to a destructive slippery slope. Once someone starts to rationalize, trivialize, and justify lying, it certainly becomes easier to lie the next time. Conversely, once we learn to tell the truth, every time, and habituate telling the truth, regardless of the consequences, it becomes easier and easier. It eventually becomes our nature. Then we can enjoy the benefits of trust—a clear conscience—and we don't have to try to remember all our lies!

Questions to ask your children this month:

- What is honesty?
- Are you an honest person?
- What is a lie?
- Why should people be honest?
- If someone catches you lying, why is it so hard to regain that person's trust?
- Why do you think people tell lies?
- What would you think if you saw a classmate cheat?
- What would you do if you saw a classmate cheat?
- In the chapter book *The Big Mistake*, why do you think Jake had so much trouble trying to decide what to do?
- Why do you think Biff is such a mean kid?
- What would you have done when Biff took the watch from Jake?
- Have you been bullied at school? If so, how did you act?
- If you could ask Mr. Lacey a question right now, what would you ask?
- If you could ask Zaki a question right now, what would you ask?
- Does lying to someone show him or her love and respect?
- Do you like it when people lie to you?
- How can we all become more honest people?