

Teaching Integrity to a 2nd-4th Grader



How do children of this age think?

Here's a scenario that might be familiar to you: You were recently made aware that your child took something that didn't belong to him/her, either within your own home, at school, or in a public setting. When you confront your child, his/her response is "What's the big deal; it's just a _____ (*small item*); and besides, nobody saw me....who told you?"

It's difficult to deal with your child's response because it shows a lack of integrity, something we all hope our children learn. So, how can we work with this situation?

Some suggestions for helping children grow in integrity

Here are some considerations and suggestions for helping your child grow in integrity:

- **Integrity involves every decision we make. It is about making the right choice for the right reason — not because of the praise we receive, but because it's the right thing to do.**
 - Don't let the desire for your child's success stand in the way of helping him or her make the right choice. It is better for your child to fail a test than to cheat; it is better for your child to be cut from the team rather than discredit another team member.
- **Integrity isn't only about what we do in front of others; it's about how we respond even when we're alone, when no one sees or knows. It demands that we hold moral principles so dear that we stand for them when others walk away.**
 - Teach your child the meaning of the commandments so they have a moral compass to guide them.
 - Point out a tough choice made by someone your child knows – a playmate, teacher, coach, religious leader. Talk about the cost of that choice, but the ultimate benefit of living with integrity.
- **When your child makes a poor choice and gets away with it, play the "what if" game.**
 - Help your child see what it would be like if someone did this to him/her.
 - Show your child that the trust that's merited with a good choice is far reaching and more beneficial than the short-term reward achieved through a poor choice.
- **Help your child imagine the consequences of a poor decision before he is confronted with it.**
 - When you suspect a situation will be coming up that requires your child to make an unpopular decision – perhaps a sleepover with friends whose parents have a different standard for behavior than you have for your child – tell your child a story that will help him/her see how a poor decision could play out. Include the difficulties, range of emotions, mistakes and accolades so he can explore the gray areas of integrity in his imagination.
- **Help your child understand that dishonesty has a rippling effect.**
 - When something comes up in a movie plot or news item, take the opportunity to point out all the lives that were changed by a lie.
 - Ask your child to suggest a better decision, regardless how hard it would be to make.