

# Restoring Trust Between Adolescents and Parents

## Moving Past the Lies



**Jeff Nave, Ph.D., LPC-S, LMFT-S, NCC**  
Professor of Counseling  
Director of Leeke Magee Christian Counseling Center  
**Alex R. Wendel, M.A., M.A., PLPC**  
Associate Director  
Leeke Magee Christian Counseling Center

# Objectives

- Participants will consider the range of conditions in which deception and breach of trust become the primary therapeutic focus in family therapy.
- Participants will consider specific family therapy interventions for addressing patterns of deception and dishonesty on the part of adolescent children.
- Participants will practice addressing deception and dishonesty with family therapy based case studies and scenarios.



# Rationale

- Issues of trust and dishonesty are often cited as a primary cause for concern among families of adolescents seeking treatment or consultation.
- There is little clinical research addressing lying to parents among adolescents and emerging adults upon which to base intervention strategies.  
(Jensen, Arnett, Feldman & Cauffman, 2004;  
Desmond, 2012)



# Should lying be a primary focus of Family Therapy?

- When addressing repeated, material deception.
- When deception is acknowledged by parents and child OR both parents have agreed to proceed with the assumption of dishonesty.
- Critical in Substance Use treatment.



# Some of the truth, part of the truth and some observations that may be true.

- Adolescents asked to define “lying” focused on the active communication of information known to be false with the intention to deceive another party. (Desmond, 2012)
- The majority of adolescents (82% in one study) acknowledged lying to their parents about some of their behaviors or relationships within the last year. (Jensen, Arnett, Feldman, & Cauffman, 2004)
- Most adolescents and young adults (91% in one study) believe that lying is a fundamental wrong. (Perkins & Turiel, 2007)



# Individual factors related to likelihood of lying to parents

- Lower “self-restraint” as measured by personality instruments is associated with higher acknowledged incidents of lying.  
(Jensen, Arnett, Feldman & Cauffman, 2004)
- Higher “tolerance for deviance” is associated with higher acknowledged incidents of lying.  
(Jensen, Arnett, Feldman & Cauffman, 2004)
- Regular drug and/or alcohol use are highly predictive of lying. (Desmond & Kraus, 2012)



# Individual factors (cont.)

Desmond and Kraus (2012) discovered an interaction between religious commitment and frequency of church attendance, and an unexpected outcome:

- Religious commitment had a negative (good) influence on lying behavior.
- Church attendance had a positive (not good) influence on lying behavior.
- The interaction of these variables produced a stronger prediction; adolescents reporting low religious commitment and high frequency of church attendance had an unexpectedly high frequency of lying to parents.



# Family factors related to likelihood of lying to parents

- Perceived parental control was a positive predictor of lying behavior. (Jensen, Arnett, Feldman & Cauffman, 2004)
- Family cohesion had a negative influence on lying behavior. (Jensen, Arnett, Feldman & Cauffman, 2004)



# Not all lies are the same

- Adolescents rated the acceptability of a lie according to topic and rationale.
- Lies told about sexual behavior or relationships were rated more acceptable than lies about drug use or grades.
- Lies told to protect others were consistently rated more acceptable than lies told to protect self from consequences.

(Jensen, Arnett, Feldman & Cauffman, 2004)



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# The cost of deception

- Lying always diminishes intimacy.
- Lying Disrupts family cohesion.
- Lying may be caused by and lead to negative developmental outcomes. (Engels, Finkenauer & van Kooten)
- Parents of children who have lied begin to initiate communication less often. (Engels, Finkenauer & van Kooten)
- Desensitization and Habituation



# Therapeutic initiatives consistent with the research

- Structural, Strategic and Solution Focused modalities offer a good format: practical proscription for communication tasks.
- Joining with the family prior to discussion of the presenting problem.
- Carefully control initial dialogue about the problem.



# Therapeutic initiatives (cont.)

- Direct inventory of topics which have not been impacted by lying.
- Direct discussion of what makes lying wrong.
- Direct discussion of what makes telling the truth hard.
- Direct discussion about the difference between secrecy and privacy.
- Develop template for sensitive inquiries.



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# Practice



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# Contact for Presentation

[jnave@nobts.edu](mailto:jnave@nobts.edu)



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