



Is It OK to Lie?

Sometimes we stretch the truth to be polite.
But where should we draw the line? **By Maggie Pierce**

Your best friend shows up at school with a new haircut. It is *not* a good haircut. In fact, it looks like he lost a wrestling match with a lawn mower.

"What do you think?" he asks, looking you straight in the eye.

Your heart races. Your mind swirls. It's obvious your buddy feels insecure about his new look and is hoping for your approval. You don't want to hurt his feelings. You should just tell him his hair looks great, right?

But wait. Wouldn't that be lying? And isn't lying . . . wrong?

Living With Lies

Wrong or not, the fact is we all lie—a lot. Most Americans lie about twice a day.* In other words, we bend the truth about as often as we brush our teeth.

A lie is a statement that is deliberately meant to mislead. Some people feel that any lie—no matter how minor or well-intentioned—is morally wrong. We depend on each other to be honest, and **deceiving** those we care about can damage our relationships. Plus, if we can't assume that others are telling the truth, how can we trust anything we hear or read?

What's the Big Deal?

You've probably told a few **fib**s that seemed harmless—but were they really? Telling tiny lies, experts say, makes us more likely to tell bigger, more harmful lies in the future.

"The problem with small lies is that they **accumulate** and we lose track of them," says Howard Temple, who **administers** lie-detector tests.

Plus, once you tell a lie (say, claiming LeBron James is your cousin), you might have to tell more lies to keep up the **charade** (you're going to Los Angeles to visit LeBron over winter break). Before

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*According to National Geographic.

you know it, you'll be terrified of running into your friends over the holidays because you're supposed to be in California hanging with LeBron.

Better to Be Polite

Still, lying may have its place—especially when it's done to protect someone's feelings. "Most of the time, being kind to someone is more important than telling the absolute truth," says Jane Frank, a psychologist in New York City.

It turns out that lying might even be good for your social life. White lies can help you smooth out awkward situations and make others around you feel better, says Dr. Robert Feldman, a professor who researches lying. In this way, he says, lying could be seen as a valuable social skill.

Perhaps the key is to think about why you're lying. There's a difference between lying to spare yourself—like faking illness to miss a big test—and lying to spare someone else. Of course, even lying out of kindness can be complicated. It would be cruel to tell your sister she's an awful cook. But if she plans to audition for *Chopped Junior*, being honest and telling her she needs to hone her skills first could save her from colossal disappointment.

So what do you tell your friend about his horrendous haircut? The truth or a lie?

Well, there is a third option: Don't say anything. Instead, "accidentally" drop your books, have a sudden coughing fit, and change the subject.

Then go buy him a nice hat. ●

What Do You Think?

Is it ever OK to lie? Go back to the article to find arguments that support each side of this debate. Write the information on the lines below.



YES

Kindness matters most.

1 It's important to protect people's feelings.

2 _____

3 _____

NO

Lying is wrong. Period.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Examine points on both sides of the debate—as well as your own beliefs—and decide what you think. State your opinion in one sentence below. This can be your thesis statement for an essay on this topic.

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