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A LIE IS A BOTHER

Children are generally in agreement that a lie is "bad." They are not in such unanimity of opinion as to what a lie is, exactly. They seem more concerned with consequences than with the onus engendered by the telling of the lie. Parents, likewise, are quick to condemn a lie but equally uneasy about the exact identification of a lie. Have you as a parent ever avoided an unwanted engagement by use of an "excuse" which is nothing more than a convenient lie?

There is a thoughtful children's story about the mother crab who criticizes her child for walking sideways which mother deems ugly and clumsy. When the child protests that mother, also, walks sideways, mother crab snaps, "Don't do as I do; do as I say!" Is it possible that the position that an untruth is always bad is an untenable one? The "white" lie or "strategic" lie has become so generally accepted in the adult world that parents seldom think what this ambivalence of principle does to children's thinking. Children echo the denunciation of the lie but in actuality are quite tolerant of its usage. They do not seem to denounce the lie intrinsically but only for the negative effect it seems to have on persons in authority.

"You know when you tell a lie your mother and father might find out about it and give you a spanking." Ginny said, "If you kicked a friend...for no reason ...you might give him trouble and your mother and father..and maybe baby sister...wouldn't like it." Scott said, "If you said something that somebody else did it but they didn't then you'd be telling the wrong thing and then you might

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get a spanking." The telling of the lie itself seemed to incur no feelings of guilt but the fear of repercussion did. Karl said, "A lie is bad because you aren't telling the truth and your mom and dad get all upset about it."

John dimly sensed that the issue was not clear-cut but that there were ambiguities and exigencies that affected the whole issue. "Sometimes..people just sort of want to tease you. I don't know how you tell the difference between a lie and being teased. I think a lie is something you don't mean it...you just mean to make it so they think something else...not the truth."

Perhaps Brandon was the most acute...and the most practical when he said, "You know, you get a funny look on your face when you're telling a lie and then everybody knows when you're doing a lie or not. So you might as well not!"