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**I hate to say it,
but children with ADHD
don't always tell the truth.**

Consider this: What if, every day, you were asked to do all of the things you just weren't good at—fulfill obligations that you found so onerous, you would gladly pay someone else to do them for you? Scrubbing the toilet, mowing the lawn, hosting your in-laws, cleaning out the basement—how far would you go to avoid them? Would you put them off? Maybe even tell a few white lies?

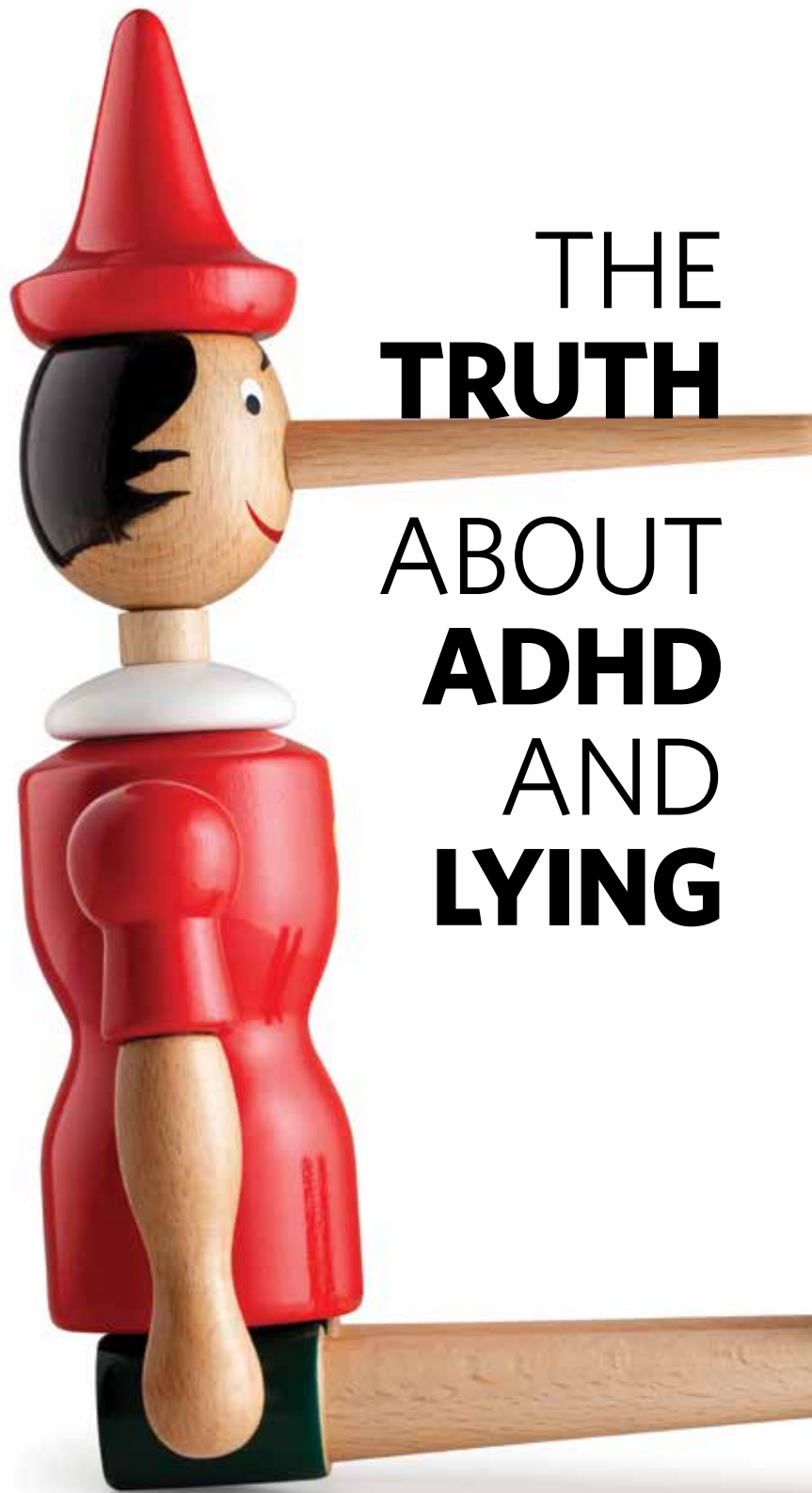
For many students coping with executive function challenges, ADHD, and other learning disabilities, those types of tortuous tasks would include organizing, planning, initiating projects, completing homework, reading long tracts of text, studying, taking notes, and remembering to turn in assignments and prepare for tests. And almost every day during the school year, that's what they're asked to do. Is it any wonder that students avoid those obligations, procrastinate, and even resort to lying in order to escape the frustration and aversion that schoolwork can generate?

Parents often cringe at the thought that their child would “lie” to them. Most parents believe that honesty is a very important value to teach their offspring. Students with learning differences don't lie and evade because they are morally deficient. For them, it's simply a coping mechanism.

What's a parent to do?

Although lying is a worrisome behavior, avoid overreacting. Parents and teachers can help students address this issue and change the cycle with simple tactics. Watch for patterns related to this type of reaction and try to disrupt them. Work to remove the shame of lying by showing that you understand the situation. Remember that the behavior isn't personal and try to avoid situations where lying becomes the only option. Help the student recognize and strategize for ways to manage the problem more effectively the next time around.

Here are some reasons why children with ADHD don't always tell the truth. They may say that they don't have any homework, when in fact they do. Many times, they have honestly forgotten something and are not lying intentionally. Other times, lying is prompted by impulsivity and a desire to avoid punishment or unpleasant work, especially



THE TRUTH ABOUT ADHD AND LYING

homework. Keep in mind that they often have additional learning challenges that may be a major factor in homework avoidance. So working with the school to identify these coexisting learning problems is critical.

Typically, as teenagers mature and achieve more successes at school and home, they are more likely to be truthful. It's important for parents to work on reducing the stresses that may be the reason their child resorts to telling a lie.

Here are five solid strategies to help you address your child's "lying."

1. If you know the answer, don't ask.

Don't create opportunities for your child to lie. If you know for a fact that she did something wrong, don't ask her if she committed the misdeed. For example, don't ask if she finished her homework if you know she hasn't done it. This is not the time to test her honesty. If you observed the misbehavior firsthand, you should state the facts you know, and simply impose consequences without badgering or yelling—as much as possible.

"You know your curfew is 12:30 on weekends. It's 1:30 AM and you didn't call and let me know where you were or if anything was wrong. You'll have to come in an hour earlier this weekend. Call me if you're going to be late so I won't worry."

"You hit your brother first when he wouldn't give you the remote control. That's not acceptable. Now, I'm going to turn off the television for fifteen to thirty minutes. Maybe next time you'll remember to take turns using the remote and come up with a better solution than fighting."

2. Eliminate some punishment.

If you believe that your child is lying to avoid punishment for a behavior such as not finishing homework, Dr. Sydney Zentall suggests that you eliminate the punishment.

3. Develop a plan to solve the problem.

Of course, you must develop a plan to deal with the problem that your teen has been lying about—for example, not completing homework. Consider the following in developing this plan:

- The child may not be able to concentrate because medication has worn off. Consider talking with your doctor about prescribing a small dose

of short-acting medication for homework.

- Identify any learning disabilities.
- Take "brain breaks" during homework and sip on Gatorade or a similar drink to improve brain functioning.
- Consider teaching your child new skills or supervise homework more closely.
- Homework assignments may be too long. You may need to request that they be shortened or that accommodations be made for class work.

4. Impose a consequence.

You may decide to impose an appropriate consequence if your teenager has been dishonest.

"You told me you were going to spend the night with Rosa and then told Rosa's parent's that you were staying here. Then you both stayed out all night and partied. That kind of behavior isn't acceptable. I'm putting you on restrictions Friday night."

5. Provide your child with ADHD education.

Last, but far from least, educate your child about his ADHD and other learning challenges. If a teen understands why he's easily tempted to avoid telling the truth, or why he's often late, or loses things, he will be more likely to use a strategy to compensate for these challenges. Plus you are strengthening his self-esteem indirectly by making him aware that he's not just lazy, disobedient, or dishonest.

Numerous educational resources are available to help, including *A Bird's-Eye View of Life with ADHD*, featuring advice from teens; *Real Life ADHD*, a DVD featuring thirty teens from across the country; and *Teenagers with ADD, ADHD, and Executive Function Deficits*. 📺

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