

## Psychosomatics of Children's Lying in Preschool Children

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### *Abstract*

Children's lying is often a defense mechanism of children. Adolescents are afraid of the authority of significant people around them – parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, older brothers and sisters. These fearful experiences develop into a psychosomatic expression of the children's experiences, emotions and feelings. They are unable to process this emotional burden and react with a somatic disorder. The children's lie is an occasion to try to look into the world of the child in his growing up process from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> year. In this period of development, many new impressions, observations, sensations suddenly invade the child's world intensively and from everywhere. With each new day, the child discovers more new things, some of which he learns from his parents, others – from his older brother and/or sister, third – from children's movies, fourth – from fairy tales, fifth – from movies, sixth – from walks in the park, etc. When the child's psyche is overwhelmed by so many new impressions, and when the child at the same time does not have the resources to deal with the arrangement of the newly received information from the surrounding world, confusion occurs; to mixing real with imaginary/fantasy; of what happened to me now with what happened to my comrade; of what happened to me now in this way with the way I wanted it to happen (as in the fairy tale or in the movie). The lack of ability to make such a difference between a reality and an imagined situation leads to qualifications as a "childish lie." Usually, the adult closest to the child, who spends most of the time during the day with the adolescent, knows his mental world and could act as a "translator" of what the child really means. It is crucial to give the necessary time and attention, and for the child to be listened to, the parent should make for himself a distinction between fiction and a lie, and only then should a distinction be made between reality and a lie.

*Keywords:* psychosomatics, children, adolescents, children's lie.

### 1. Introduction

Children's lying is often a defense mechanism of children. Adolescents are afraid of the authority of significant people around them – parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, older brothers and sisters. These fearful experiences develop into a psychosomatic expression of the children's experiences, emotions and feelings. They are unable to process this emotional burden and react with a somatic disorder.

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The lack of ability to make such a difference between a reality and an imagined situation leads to qualifications as a “childish lie.” Usually, the adult closest to the child, who spends most of the time during the day with the adolescent, knows his mental world and could act as a “translator” of what the child really means. It is crucial to give the necessary time and attention, and for the child to be listened to, the parent should make for himself a distinction between fiction and a lie, and only then should a distinction be made between reality and a lie.

## 2. Methods

In my psychotherapy practice, for the past 8 years, I have worked with hundreds of children with psychosomatic symptoms, coming from disharmonious families (families with dominant only primary or only secondary abilities; with the inability to integrate a balance between them in the conceptual framework of the family environment). My observations date back to January 2016 up to date.

Dealing with precisely defined test methodologies is not cost-effective and does not produce results. The method of working with adolescents should be based on the individual needs of the child (Gieler, 1987).

I conducted each therapy session using art therapy tasks for the child to complete. I also emphasized the product of the child’s activity. Each of the above ways of determining the function of a child’s lie leads the adult on the right path. Many children are called liars when they dream or fantasize. Labeling the child a liar could not have the educational effect that the parent aims for with this qualification, but the opposite effect – the child really hides from the adult and turns lying into his daily routine (Jores, 1981). But even then one must observe what lies behind the untrue statement itself.

## 3. Results

The results of my work were already visible on the fifth meeting with the children. In that short period of time they had learned how to distinguish between fantasies, dreams, untruths and outright lies.

In this line of thought, it is important to note that it is not enough to ask the question “Why?”, which by presumption automatically leads to the activation of the defense mechanisms of the other person. The emotional status of the parent and the child would change if the question took the following form: “For what?” For what purpose?”, which implies reintegration and a tendency towards unity and further development and expansion of the goals in the direction of improving the family environment (Cobb, 1974).

In the psychotherapist’s office, parents often appear with a request to work with the child’s lie: “He started lying”, “He tries to lie to me, but I always catch him”, “How did he learn to lie?” are the most common responses, with which guardians enter the therapy studio. In fact, 90% of the time, parents target children’s imagination, especially fiction. The sharp prohibition expressed by the line “I forbid you to lie” is actually a breakdown in the system of imagination and creative activity in the child, since he does not distinguish between a lie and a fiction.

#### 4. Discussion

Parents also use lies – knowingly, deliberately and by the same means. They do it because their parents and everyone around them allowed such psychological experience to accumulate, but it brought its added value through sayings like “A lie has short legs.” One of the good methods that the therapist brings is related to the implementation of fairy-tale therapy in psychoanalytic psychotherapy. The story of Pinocchio gives a visual explanation to children regarding lying, and their imagination should NOT be limited in the construction of the image of Pinocchio and his long nose (Benedetti, 1983).

Sometimes the first children’s fictions, mistaken for “lies”, are a copy of what was said by an adult. In such cases, the child’s performance gives rise to affection, because the adult realizes how out of place this lie appeared. The child should hear: “You are too young to do as I do; like mom, dad, dad, etc. As you grow up there will be times when you will need to do this. Now – no!”

The function of the resulting lie is: “to try to do things like the big ones; to show that I am ready to learn from them.” The failure of children’s behavior comes from the lack of social experience (it only makes sense within the school environment and after that) and undoubtedly mostly from the child’s poor ability to differentiate between goal and means; mine and foreign; suitable now and suitable for the future, as well as due to the lack of sense of time and space.

This function of lying is inherent in the 2-3-year-old child, when he very intensively begins to accumulate behavioral experience through speech. He does it on the model of the adults around him, but without the ability to distinguish the details of the situation (Kinzl, 1989).

Around the age of 4, the child has become independent in many ways, but not always successfully. In the child’s soul, emotions begin to accumulate from experiences that he has the need to share with someone. The parent often does not have the time or resources; he cannot allow that the given situation will create reluctance and even fear in the child to be alone. At such a moment, the child could hardly help himself just to gain the emotional comfort of the adult. Here comes a different function of lying. Thanks to the already good enough opportunities, the child fantasizes pictures of his fears and projects them on the screen of his mind. He dresses them now in characters from fairy tales, now in actors from movies, now in unpleasant psychosomatic sensations (“I’m scared, I want to sleep with you,” “My stomach hurts,” etc.

Adolescents use lying as a tool to deal with conflicts. This function comes down to the first age crisis (the crisis of resentment), the child learns his first psychological experience of winning in a conflict situation, because he will “serve”, i.e., will bring part of the truth or his fiction (Boncheva, 2013: 15-18). This is a necessary protective reaction of the child, as specified above. It has its good side - to achieve satisfaction of one’s own desires and intentions at any cost: to provoke the adult into unraveling, getting to know children’s needs.

#### 5. Conclusion

Whatever the child may have provoked with his fantasy untruths, it is not permissible to impose punishment, which in any case risks harming the mental world of the adolescent – including insulting qualifications such as “liar” and remarks such as “You can’t you can be trusted are detrimental to children’s peace of mind” (Klein; 2002: 11-15).

Denial, untruthfulness, fantasy become harmful to the child when it is very difficult for him to part with his fantasy constructions, when they occupy a large part of the time of waking consciousness. Thus, the child’s “lie” ceases to be associated with fantasy images and becomes “automaticity and compulsiveness” (Freud, 2000: 150-160).

We are entering an era in which new ideas, new methods and new understandings are emerging regarding the perception of children's personality. Science eradicates established habits and traditions. The knowledge we acquire creates new responsibilities for the parent, but in compensation allows him a better insight into childhood problems, and for the therapist the added value is obtaining greater opportunities to help the children entrusted to him (Fosha, 2000: 18-22). It is very important as psychotherapists and psychoanalysts to convince ourselves that the individual manifestation considered in the overall appearance of the personality has no meaning, and we can only appreciate it if we analyze it in relation to the child's personality as a whole (Frijda, 2009: 264-271).

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