

## Sincerity is a must.

Strategies to foster honesty in children.

Sincerity is essential if we are to be able to face and address situations, the truth about ourselves and about others, and if we are to be able to face objectively the impact of our actions on others, if we are to be direct and transparent in relationships and face up to the duties permanent relationships place on us.

Reverence for sincerity crosses all cultural boundaries. Confucius said *'Sincerity and truth are the basis of every virtue.'* Cicero wrote, *'Nature has instilled in our minds an insatiable desire to see truth.'* He advised simply *'Do not pretend one thing and do another.'* The Talmud, a Jewish text from early centuries after Christ, too: *'If you add to the truth, you subtract from it.'*

The word 'sincerity' comes from the Latin *sine*, meaning 'without', and *cera* meaning 'wax'. There are two theories for this: one suggests that sculptors liked blocks of marble which were flawless, without imperfections plugged with wax. Another theory holds that trustworthy messengers were sent with messages unsealed, and therefore without wax. In both stories, the virtue of honesty is demonstrated.

Sincerity is best established as a habit in a young person. It is not normal for children, by the time they are seven or so, to be insincere. If children do not tell the truth it is important to work out the causes: whether it is because of fear of consequences, poor example from peers, ingrained habits, wanting to look good, perhaps even parent example. Whatever the cause, it needs to be addressed.

### Practical approaches to teaching sincerity.



Parents teach a love for truth when they themselves embrace reality without fear. Why are we so scared of the truth? Why is it so hard for us to admit we are wrong? Why do we find apologies so difficult? Someone once said, *'We should keep so close to facts that we never have to remember the second time what we said the first time!'* We adults must never bend the truth. Children have a well-developed hypocrisy aerial.



Old Chaps. Never undervalue the importance of being earnest.



Model integrity. Accept feedback humbly from your spouse, children, parents and work colleagues, and make resolutions to fix whatever needs fixing. Let children see your own efforts to improve.



A seven year old should already know the difference between reality and fabrication. To teach honesty and openness to a seven-year-old child you may need to remind your child that you were seven once, so you know a story when you hear one. Make eye contact – it makes it more difficult for a child to lie.



Don't punish for telling the truth about a wrongdoing; give praise for having the courage to tell the truth, to give the child a way out. To help your child never be afraid of telling the truth because of the punishment, ask '*What do you think is a fair punishment?*' if they are caught out. Teach the importance of deep contrition for mistakes, as we can only correct mistakes we have acknowledged in our hearts. Let them buy in, to be part of the solution.



Correct each small act of insincerity. Habits of dishonesty can be alarmingly ingrained; long patterns of stealing, deception and baldfaced lies can come out far too late. Opportunities to correct dishonesty must be taken when they arise. Agree on concrete consequences for future slipups. And then firmly, but with infinite affection, hold your child to the deal.



When a child is insincere, try to understand why. Is it a problem of your example, or a fear of your temper, or a problem of peer or older sibling example, or a naïveté on your part so that simple lies have become habitual? As a couple, explore the causes so you can fix the problem.



Allow natural consequences to take their course – a lie to a teacher should be fixed by honesty and an apology, shoplifting requires restitution and face-to-face apology, etc. Explain your reasons for insisting on consequences.



Teach that insincerity harms others and breaks relationships. Teach that apologies repair relationships. Teach that forgiveness following apologies is Christian and also a vital necessity. Pride that stops forgiveness is just as great an obstacle to relationships.



Don't punish while you are emotional. Publilius Syrus in the first century BC taught, '*In a heated argument we are apt to lose sight of the truth*'. If you have become angry, apologise, or take time out, and then listen to your child's view.



Teach your child to assess motives, by reflecting on the causes and consequences of his or her actions. Particularly focus on the consequences that are repercussions on others. Charity is the biggest lesson. Respect for others in all things; this is the bottom line.

**Source:** [Institute of Advanced Family Studies, Internatinonal University of Catalonia.](http://www.uic.es/en/marriage-education-family)  
e-MEF program. <http://www.uic.es/en/marriage-education-family>