

## Lying, arguing, and negotiating\*

"In the dictionary, the antonym of honesty is lying, and the opposite of arguing is agreement. But in the minds of teenagers, that's not how it works. To an adolescent, arguing is the opposite of lying.

When asked when and why they told the truth to their parents about things they knew their parents disapproved of the main motivation was that teens told their parents the truth in hopes their parents might give in, and say it was okay. Usually, this meant an argument ensued, but it was worth it if their parents might budge.

In families where there was less deception, there was a much higher ratio of arguing/complaining. Arguing was good—arguing was honesty. The parents didn't necessarily realize this. The arguing stressed them out.

Forty-six % of the mothers rated their arguments as being destructive to the relationship. Being challenged was stressful, chaotic, and (in their perception) disrespectful. But only 23% of the daughters felt that their arguments were destructive. Far more believed that fighting strengthened their relationship with their mother.

The variable that seemed to matter the most was how the arguments were resolved. Daughters who rated arguing as destructive had parents who stonewalled, rather than collaborated.

Parents who negotiate ultimately appear to be more informed. Parents with unbending, strict guidelines make it a tactical issue for kids to find a way around them.

This makes sense, yet it's a very controversial finding, because in our society today we are warned not to be pushovers; were advised that giving in breeds a nation of whiners and beggars.

Pushover parents are those who give in to their kid because they can't stand to see their child cry, or whine. They placate their children just to shut them up. They want to be their kid's friend, and they're uncomfortable being seen as the bad guy. That's not the same as a parent who makes sure her child feels heard, and if the child has made a good argument for why a rule needs to be changed, lets that influence her decision.

The type of parents who were lied to the least had rules and enforced them consistently, but they found a way to be flexible that allowed the rule-setting process to still be respected. If a child's normal curfew is eleven p.m., and they explain to their parent something special is happening, so the parent says, 'Okay, for that night only, you can come home at one a.m.—that encourages the kid not to lie, and to respect the time.' This collaboration retains a parent's legitimacy."

---

\*Excerpts taken from *Nurture Shock: New thinking about children* by Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman, pages 147-151. For more information go to: [www.nurtureshock.com](http://www.nurtureshock.com)