

What I Wish I Knew

About lying to kids

Anyone who says they never lie to their children is telling whoppers, says **Marty Wilson**



With the Easter Bunny's annual visit approaching, I asked some couples what fibs and outright lies they tell their children. For the record, every parent I consulted said convenient little fibs such as "the video shop is closed today" or "this pool has special dye that makes your wee turn red" are important parts of a parent's survival kit. The only thing separating a good lie from a bad one is the intention behind it.

Stories to boost fantasy. I love all the out-and-out whoppers we tell kids to encourage a sense of wonder in their world. The Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy, making a wish when you blow out the candles on your birthday cake – all in good fun. One year I dressed up as Santa for all the three- and four-year-olds staying with us, and the joyous wonder they greeted me with – dressed in a tacky Santa suit, a taped-on beard and a pillow stomach – well, if that's wrong, I don't want to be right. Kids adore a good story and often they're just playing along.

When my dad arrives at our house, the kids always answer the door and ask him,

Marty Wilson is a stand-up comic and professional speaker. His latest book is *What I Wish I Knew About Love* (Allen & Unwin, \$17.99)

"Where have you been, Poppy?" His answer is always the same, "What do you want, the truth or a good story?" They always respond with a chorus of "Good Stooooooooooorrrry!". Then he's off, telling my boys about fighting sharks, rumbling bears or evading "Terrible Tom the T. rex" to get to our house.

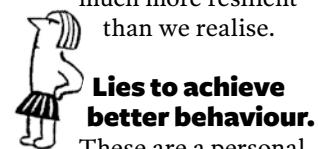
Lies to "protect their innocence". There are times when sanitising life is useful, but I suspect we often do this more to avoid embarrassment, and hence miss out on the chance to connect with our kids in a meaningful way.

My six-year-old, Connor, adores David Attenborough. After watching *The Life of Mammals*, he asked, "Dad, do you mate with Mummy?"

Apart from my internal reaction of, *Fantastic, here's five new minutes of comedy material!*, I sensed this could be important. I played it straight and told him that with people it's called "making love" and then explained exactly what happens. He gave me a gigantic hug, said,



"I love you, Dad", then went back to what he was doing. If, 300 years ago, children could see sex, birth, death and more on a daily basis, and the human race seemed to survive, then they must be much more resilient than we realise.



Lies to achieve better behaviour.

These are a personal call, and I refuse to judge anyone. I know I've overstepped the mark here a few times (having picked up the phone and dialled the "Bad Boys' Home").

I'm not alone. One friend, whenever she hears a seatbelt in the back being unbuckled, pulls the car over to the side of the road, as if it's broken down, then asks, "Has anyone undone their belt? The car

won't work unless they're all done up." Another convinced her kids that the doctors "fixed her ears" so that she "can't hear whingeing". When her

children start moaning about something, she walks around, pretending she's totally unaware of the racket, until they start using a normal voice. Awesome, truly awesome.



Untruths to promote healthy eating. Whatever it takes. Lie till your pants are

ablaze. The end justifies the means. The eating habits our kids develop now will play a huge role in their future health, so tell them anything to get a balanced diet into their gobs. One friend told me her

kids would only eat chicken. So they get all different kinds of it - fish is "soft chicken"; all sausages are "chicken sausages"; salmon is "pink chicken". No harm done. Another fantastic one is, "Eat carrots when you're young, and when you grow up you'll be able to see through walls like Superman." And an effective one for boys: "Broccoli makes you fart more."

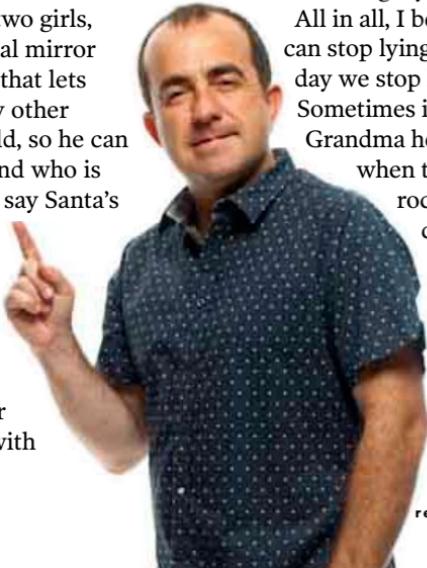
Santa – a very powerful persuader. There's something irresistible about the leverage you get over your kids in December. One couple told their two girls, "Santa has a special mirror in the North Pole that lets him see out of any other mirror in the world, so he can tell who is good and who is bad." They had to say Santa's mirror got broken when the girls wouldn't go to sleep until they'd covered up every millimetre of their bedroom mirror with towels.



Last year there was an iPhone application called Call from Santa that let you put in a child's name, choose whether they were "naughty" or "nice", then, when your iPhone rang, the poor kid would hear a Santa voice telling him personally he'd have to sharpen up his act or there'd be no prezzies this year.

Another couple worked out how to hold Christmas over their kids all year by telling them, "Every time you are bad, Santa replaces a toy in your sack with a potato." Then, on Christmas Day, they put a couple of spuds in their kids' stockings. One year a fight broke out on Christmas Day, so the dad held up one of the potatoes and asked, "I wonder what present this was before you were so naughty?"

All in all, I believe the day we can stop lying to our kids is the day we stop lying to each other. Sometimes it's kind to tell Grandma her muffins are lovely when they're teeth-splitting rock cakes. And, of course, it's always OK to say, "No, my love, that dress does not make your bum look big." ■



Marty