



Teaching Children Trustworthiness

The first years of life are the trust-building years. Every time you respond to your child's needs, he or she is learning to trust you, making you the most important teacher your child will ever have. Children who learn to trust others will be able to build trustworthy characteristics in themselves. These include the ability to:

- Tell the truth
- Follow the rules
- Keep promises
- Take only things that belong to them
- Talk about problems and how to solve them



These characteristics will not develop overnight. They evolve over a long period of time by watching the traits being modeled and having opportunities to practice the skills.

To build trustworthiness in children:

- **Childproof the environments of infants and toddlers.** Remove objects with which children can hurt themselves and make spaces safe to explore.
- **Establish simple rules.** Teach toddlers what is safe with a few, well chosen words such as “Don’t touch! It’s hot!” or “Walk inside” or “Pat the dog gently.”
- **Be consistent.** Follow through on what you say you will do.
- **Supervise young children, especially outdoors.** More hazards exist outside, especially with traffic in the street. Teach children how and where to play safely.

- **Be honest.** Keep your word to your child or let him know if you will be late.
- **Set an example.** Never take without asking. Give back what you borrow.
- **Establish consistent routines.** Knowing what comes next helps children trust their environment and learn self-regulation.
- **Watch TV shows and movies together.** Talk about what happened to the characters. Use “teachable moments” in every day life to model how to solve problems.
- **Read books about trustworthiness with your child.** Discuss characters and situations.

Book ideas for teaching preschoolers trust:

- *The Apple and the Arrow* – Mary and Conrad Buff
- *The Berenstain Bears and the Truth* – Stan Berenstain
- *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* - Barbara Robinson
- *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* – retold by Katherine Evans
- *Tales of Peter Rabbit* – Beatrix Potter
- *Frog and Toad are Friends* – Arnold Lobel
- *Ira Sleeps Over* – Bernard Waber
- *Tommy the Trustworthy Turtle* – Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service Character Critters series

It takes time to learn to be trustworthy, but your patience and persistence will yield big dividends as children grow and mature.

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