

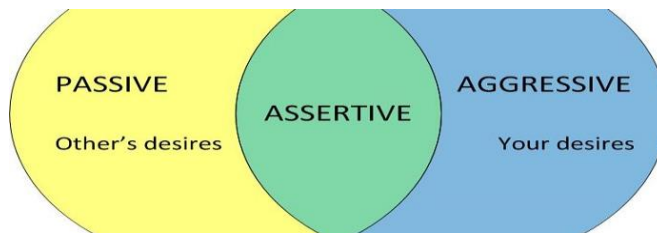


Forest Charter School

A Personalized Learning Program

Accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges

FEBRUARY CHARACTER TRAIT – Honesty/Assertiveness



Life presents us with the same dilemma again and again: should you stand up for what you want, or let other people have what they want? Some people tend toward passivity, and others lean toward aggression. A passive response honors the other person's rights, but may cause you to neglect your own needs. An aggressive response is one where you stand up for what you want, but you trample other people's rights in the process. For example, if your friends are talking about a sleepover they're planning without you, you could:

Be **passive**, and keep quiet

OR

Be **aggressive**, and tell them what a bunch of rude jerks they are for leaving you out.

Emily Gallup, school counselor, taught a six-week class for students who tend to lean in the passive direction. These children are so polite and aware of other people's feelings that they choose not to voice their own thoughts and feelings. Passive children have often been praised for their passive behavior. Teachers like them because they quietly get their work done without arguing; peers like them because they're kind and very likely to say "yes" to any request. Unfortunately, there is a downside to passivity. Being too passive (too "nice") can send the message that "What I want doesn't matter." Passive children are vulnerable to neglecting their own needs, and allowing others to hurt them. Passive adults may get passed up for promotions, or get stuck in abusive relationships. Passive people end up getting hurt.

Fortunately, there is a solution. The cure for passivity is not aggression: it's assertiveness. If you imagine a straight line with "Passive" on one side and "Aggressive" on the other, "Assertive" would be the sweet spot right in the middle. Assertiveness is standing up for ourselves, but also respecting the wishes of others. I used the analogy of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" to help the children understand this concept. If "Passive" is "too soft," and "Aggressive" is "too hard," then "Assertive" is the "just right" place in the middle.

If we go back to the original example of friends discussing an event that you're not invited to, there is a third way to respond. Instead of being passive or aggressive, you could: Be **assertive**, and tell your friends that it makes you sad to hear them making plans without you, and ask them if they could stop talking about it in front of you.

This is a hard thing for passive children to do. They're afraid of making other people angry, and they're afraid of being rejected. They don't want to get in trouble, and they don't want anyone to think they're being mean. They have trouble saying no, and they have trouble being completely honest about their feelings. Becoming assertiveness takes practice. If you want to foster assertiveness in your students, make an effort to praise your kids when you hear them speaking up for themselves. Your child will realize that assertiveness is a quality you value. If you praise your kids for their assertiveness, they're more likely to start praising themselves internally. This is the best way to get a new skill to stick. Being assertive is a way to be honest to ourselves and others, and so is not telling lies.

Being assertive is a way to be honest to ourselves and others, and so is not telling lies! Children may lie for a number of reasons—to win an argument with a sibling, to get out of doing their homework, or to deal with a difficult situation. While catching your child in a lie may be unsettling, responding to your child's lies with an emotionally mature attitude can actually provide your child with opportunities for growth. Talk to your children about what it means to be honest and why honesty is an important value.

Also consider this, kids lie to protect their connection to us. They're wired to pay close attention to what keeps us close and what pushes us away. Once kids trust that we're more interested in the feelings behind their behavior, honesty becomes much easier. Discuss the importance of being able to trust one another. Acknowledge that telling the truth may seem difficult sometimes. Sometimes we may not even notice when we are lying. While you should emphasize with your child that lying is wrong, it's also important to note that occasionally there are good reasons to lie or to not tell the entire truth and provide specific examples. If your child is given a gift that they don't really like, you might say to your child that it is important to express thanks rather than reveal your true feelings.

It feels concerning—sometimes even infuriating—when your kid says something you know isn't true. Take turns reflecting on a recent time you were dishonest. This may include telling a small white lie or even just leaving out a piece of information. If children see you telling white lies, they will think it's ok. Talk about how being honest sometimes takes a lot of courage. If a child tells a harmful lie, it's important to remind them that it is wrong to lie and why it is wrong, but it's also important to thank your child for their honesty and willingness to share. Let your child know that you are proud of their honesty.

The most reliable ways to spot lying are to watch your child's body language and observe changes in language and emotional expression. I'm sure you've been faced with those moments when you aren't quite sure if they are lying or not. Here are a couple things to look for to tell if your child might be lying.

- Long Lag Time Between a Question and Response
- Changing the Topic or Offering Irrelevant Information When Put on the Spot
- Higher Than Normal Vocal Pitch
- Lack of Natural Silence or Pausing
- Eye Contact and Eye Movement- Unable to look you in the eye or not blinking

Another way to avoid lies is to let kids know they'll be in less trouble if they tell the truth. Then follow through on that. You can also give your child a second chance to tell the truth. Walk away for a few minutes and let them answer again. Putting kids on the spot can set them up to lie. If you know what really happened, skip to that.

Teens want honesty from adults just as adults crave the truth from teens. If we both want the same thing, why is it so hard to get there? Many parents worry about whether or not their teens are lying, and what to do about it. Luckily, years of research shed light on why teens choose to tell parents the truth. Teens are more likely to be honest when they feel close to their parents. When their parents trust them to make independent decisions. And when they are given room for growth. They say that the secret ingredient is in the kind of relationship established between parents and teens. It has to do with being a "tellable" parent. One who creates an environment where young people feel empowered to share. Before we can become that kind of parent, we must understand what's behind the lies in the first place. Young people lie for similar reasons as adults. To avoid being punished, to save face, to preserve others' feelings, to try to please, or simply to get away with things they want to do. Lying is instinctual as they work to adapt to different circumstances. Everyone does it. Yet it's still maddening to be lied to. And while a toddler's lie about his sweet tooth may be endearing, a teen's lie about whether or not a party is supervised or about substance use is another story. When the stakes are high, the truth becomes that much more important. Stay strong in providing loving guidance, structure, and flexibility in allowing young people to gain increasing independence and eventually be able to set off on their own.