

Lessons in parenting: Lying to your kids



I lie to my kids all the time. I know I'm not supposed to lie. I teach my kids not to lie. But it's completely impossible to navigate the murky, treacherous waters of parenting without inserting a doozie of a fib every once in a while.

I'm not talking about the standard "untruths" we tell to kindle our kids' imagination and make their little lives fun—like about a certain white-bearded man or gnomes living in our houses.

I'm not including the little white lies we tell to ease the pain of a lost pet or calm the anxiety of a worried little one on the way to the doctor. Every parent stretches the truth when it comes to how long five minutes is or what the consequences are if you cross your eyes for too long—these are all just "givens" in the big parenting book. (Which isn't issued, but written hastily by parents as they go...)

I'm talking about flat-out whoppers that are told in the hopes of getting our kids to do what we want them to do. Lies that take death defying-leaps away from reality but ultimately, we believe, will benefit our children. In the end, these types of lies will become family folklore that our kids will tell their kids one day. "I remember grandma told me our cat got married and moved away, but really they gave him away because he kept scratching the furniture." They will laugh with their children, while shooting us an amused look.

These are the lies that keep on giving. The ones you have to elaborate and modify to keep them going. The kind of lies you have to whisper ahead of time to friends or family—dragging them into your web of deception.

My biggest and longest running lie revolved around the culinary delight we all know as the grilled cheese sandwich. My favorite food in the world! But my daughter didn't like them—refused to eat them! I wanted to make them for ~~myself~~ her because of their nutritional value (always on whole wheat), to add some variety to her meals, and because they are DOWNRIGHT yummy!

She wouldn't have anything to do with them.

One day, after refusing a grilled cheese, I asked her if she wanted me to make her a very special sandwich—A Camp Sandwich. Usually The Camp Sandwich can only be eaten while outdoors, next to an open fire. But I told her I could, just this once, make her a Camp Sandwich to try. Oh, she really wanted one, so I broke the rules “just this once” and made her the perfect Camp Sandwich.

As she ate it I told her tale after bogus tale about how I used to eat them all the time when I was a little girl. How I used to sit around campsites with my brothers eating Camp Sandwiches, petting the bears, and listening to the wood fairies sing as they worked. I really laid it on thick.

“This is the best sandwich I've ever had!” she announced as she devoured the sandwich. Mission accomplished...until...she ordered a Camp Sandwich at Ruby's, and at Red Robin and at... I think I have told every 20-year-old, uninterested server in Orange County the story of The Camp Sandwich.

The Camp Sandwich had a very long run as far as parental lies go. It lasted until my daughter was about six years old when her Aunt Jana finally (narked on me) told her the truth while spending the day at her house. She hopped in the car and proudly proclaimed, “I know a Camp Sandwich is really just a grilled cheese!”

Oh, well. At least she has a good story for her kids now and I have a daughter who enjoys a good grilled cheese as much as I

do.

(Picture by Studio Schatz)