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Issue 26

## What's a Little White Lie?

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Imagine the following situations: 1) your best friend Robert invites you and your child Mary over for dinner and when asked if she liked the meal Mary says, "it was burnt", 2) you give your son Tom a birthday present (e.g., socks) and he tells you it's not what he really wanted. As you may have already observed, throughout these scenarios, both Mary and Tom failed to lie when most individuals might chose to do so. Often in everyday interactions we lie to maintain relationships or interpersonal trust. Now consider if Mary would have said, "The dinner was great" or if Tom would have said, "I love the socks". Both Tom and Mary would have then told what is considered a prosocial lie. This is a form of lie-telling used to spare another's feelings or to maintain social cohesion, in other words, to maintain the relationship. When someone asks if we like the gift they have given to us, we might consider the consequences of telling the truth and hurting the person's feelings or telling them a *little white lie*. Although we might deem Mary and Tom's original responses to be frank or just *bluntly honest*, their lack of lie telling might be indicative of another underlying issue.

One important skill we use in social situations is our ability to infer what others are thinking or feeling during a social exchange. For example, when Mary told Robert she liked the meal, she had to consider the different responses she could have provided him. Moreover, Mary also had to consider how Robert might have understood these different responses. The ability to take another person's perspective and understand that this perspective might be different from our own is referred to by developmental researchers as *theory-of-mind*. This ability can also take a central role in our social relationships since we habitually infer what other people might be thinking or feelings and make comments based on these inferences. Researchers have found that children with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) frequently display difficulties with theory-of-mind (Baron-Cohen, 1989). As such, the theory-of-mind of children with ASD may be the one reason behind their often-honest responses in certain social situations. Parents and clinicians alike routinely report that children with ASD have difficulty in social situations and give bluntly honest responses. This is not to say that children with ASD can't or won't lie but rather they may not lie when it would be socially appropriate to do so. It should be noted that when children with ASD do lie, they are often unable to, or have difficulty with successfully maintaining their lies (Li, Kelley, Evans, & Lee, 2011). This means that if Mary was to lie to Robert and say she liked his meal, she might have difficulty telling Robert why she liked it. Similarly, parents faced with a child who has difficulty in deception may find it challenging to explicitly teach their child how to lie when it is socially appropriate.

In an effort to avoid contradictions in our attempts to promote honest, yet socially acceptable behaviour, it may be helpful to consider the development of lie-telling. Within the last 30 years, researchers have begun to examine children's lie-telling behaviours through experimental paradigms and observations within classrooms and daycares. Researchers have found that children as young as 3 years old do start to tell lies (Talwar, Murphy & Lee, 2007). Moreover, the majority of children tell many types of lies by elementary school age and do so for many reasons. Again this brings us back to the question of what parents should do when faced with a child who is bluntly honest. Although we do not want to teach our children to become dishonest, it might be helpful for parents of children with ASD to teach why we lie in certain situations.

When your best friend Robert cooks you dinner and Mary blurts out that she thought the dinner was burnt, it might be constructive to explicitly explain how Robert felt as a result of the comment after you've gone home. This should be used as a *teachable moment*. If Mary was to observe you telling a prosocial lie within a conversation, such as "the meal was great Robert" it could be helpful to explain afterwards why you told a lie rather than the truth. Beyond these suggestions, parents should be reminded that although blunt honesty can be difficult to manage at a social function or dinner party, we can also count on children with ASD to provide us with some honest feedback, which can be difficult to obtain in this deceptive world!

Shanna Williams, M. A.

References: Baron-Cohen, S. (1989). The autistic child's theory of mind: A case specific developmental delay. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 30, 285-297., Li, S. A., Kelley, A. E., Evans, D & Lee, K. (2011). Exploring the ability to deceive in children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorder*, 41, 198-195. Doi: 10.1007/s10803-010-1045-4. Talwar, V., Murphy, M. S., & Lee, K. (2007). White lie-telling in children for politeness purposes. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 30, 1-11. doi: 10.1177/0165025406073530

## Communication Corner:

The iPads and iPods are becoming popular tools to help teach our students both at home and at school. There are many excellent apps that can be used with our students with ASD to help develop their expressive language skills. The iPad has many advantages since it holds our students attention, is highly motivating, and the touch screen allows for easy manipulation of the objects on the screen. We have all seen students who are engaged in games on the computer or on the iPad but who show little interest in toys. Many apps can be used in an interactive manner but, as with any type of material, in order to build communication skills, an adult must be present to interact with the student. If left alone, the student does not have any need to communicate. The following apps can be useful in promoting expressive language with students on the Autism Spectrum.

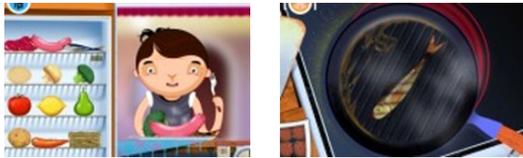


My Little Suitcase is a free app that involves choosing a location and then packing a suitcase with items that would be needed for that location. This lends itself to making predictions about what items might be needed for a particular location. The app then gives you a choice of items. This provides an opportunity to develop descriptive skills. You can take turns telling each other which item to pack by describing one of the objects on the screen.

My PlayHome is another app that is a virtual doll house. There is a free lite version with access to 2 rooms but the full version for \$2.99 gives access to 5 rooms. Your child can choose characters in a family that will interact with items in the rooms of the house. Your child can make the characters perform everyday tasks such as pouring a drink, eating, and washing dishes. After your child has explored the various rooms, you can take turns making the characters perform several actions in a row. Your child can then tell you what the characters are doing. You can use the app to build use of tenses and increase vocabulary. Before moving the characters, your child can tell you what they are going to do.



To build sequencing skills, take turns performing three actions. After you have performed the actions, your child then has to tell you what the characters did in order. This is a good way to build in temporal words like first, next, then. Then have your child perform three actions as he describes them.



Helene Packman, SLP

## Behaviour Tip:

### **Behaviour Tip: Using Special Interests as Positive Reinforcement**

Most of our students with ASD, regardless of their level of functioning, have a special area of interest, often towards a certain topic, theme, object, movie, or character. Because of its sometimes obsessional level of intensity, this type of interest can interfere with the student's functioning and learning at school. However, upon closer consideration, it may be possible to use these *obsessions* in a structured and positive manner to motivate and engage students in completing school tasks.

Rather than seeing a student's special interest as a burden, consider using it as a positive reinforcer to reward the student when s/he follows instruction and completes assigned work. Having said that, it is very important that you also structure the way this reward is given to the student. The best practice would be to break down the student's work in chunks that s/he can complete successfully and then reward him/her with an amount of time where s/he can either talk about the area of interest or do a fun activity involving this interest. For example, if a youngster loves trucks, show him/her a *First-Then* card of "first work, then truck", assign two to three short tasks, and then give 5 minutes (use a timer) to play with a favourite truck or look up images of trucks on the computer. In the case of older students, they can be rewarded with daily time to work on a computer project on a favourite hockey player or celebrity.

Try these methods consistently, for every task or demand, and they should help in facilitating the student's learning and improve his/her behaviour in the classroom.

## O.T. Corner:

### Summer Physical Leisure Activities

Students with ASD generally benefit from activities that combine high intensity of certain sensory input to support the sensory modulation process, (maintaining attention, alertness, and appropriate activity levels) necessary for productive interactions, play and learning. Three types of sensory input are favored for this purpose: (a) **deep touch input** for its calming and regulating effect; (b) **rhythmic movement input**, for its organizing, calming yet alerting effect; and (c) **proprioceptive input** (which includes resistance muscular activities and heavy work) for its calming, grounding and organizing effect. In addition to all the sensory-motor, postural, and physiological benefits (cardiovascular, respiratory, regulatory: mood, sleeping/eating patterns, etc.), physical activity also improves attention/concentration, fosters socialization and increases self-esteem. Therefore, in addition to the *Sensory Diet* activities taking place at school, the occupational therapist often recommends certain leisure activities, as they provide high doses of sensory input addressing the students' sensory needs. A few of these activities are listed below to assist families in preparing for the upcoming summer months.

**Taking Walks, Stair Climbing, and Hiking:** These activities, in appropriate intensity, allow for consistent muscular effort which facilitates grounding and calming, as well as the development of postural stability and endurance.

**Swimming:** Moving limbs in the water and swimming against gravity provides high doses of deep touch and proprioceptive input that have grounding, organizing, and calming effects. Programs such as *Aqua-Percept* (Pointe-Claire), *Aqua-Kids* (YMCA in NDG), or *Making Waves* (individual swimming lessons for children with special needs; [www.makingwavescanada.com](http://www.makingwavescanada.com)), and recreational centers, such as *Aquadôme* (LaSalle), may support sensory-motor development while the child participates in enjoyable, social activities.

**Playground Activities:** Regular outings to the neighborhood park offer an opportunity to develop essential motor planning and gross motor skills. With supervision/assistance from an adult, sliding in different positions, playing on swings, using see-saws, Merry-go-rounds, rocking horses, bouncers, monkey bars, etc. develop core muscles, endurance, and may support vestibular processing by providing acceleration/deceleration and stop/go movement. Movement is food to the brain. It increases tone, facilitates alertness, is essential to sustain functional activity level, in addition to laying the foundation for spatial-relations and constructional abilities. Outings at *Jungle Adventure* (Laval, St-Leonard), *Parc-Soleil* (LaSalle), *Fundomondo* (Pointe-Claire, Pincoirt) or *Cache à l'eau* (Boucherville) can be a variant to the playground, when the child has a good tolerance for busy multi-sensory environments.

**Indoors/Outdoors Obstacle Course and Floor Playtime:** These activities (including log rolling, tummy and hands & knees crawling, bunny hopping, crab walk, animal walks, etc.) require controlled movements promoting grounding, body awareness, motor planning, coordination, and bilateral integration.

**Ball Games:** Ball games support the development of body and eye-hand coordination in fun ways. Play at catching/hitting a suspended ball (with hands, stick, or racket), balloon volleyball/badminton, beach ball soccer, beanbag games, basketball, or bowling, and encourage the use of one hand at a time, or two hands simultaneously/alternately.

**Trampoline play:** Some children crave high intensity movement-proprioceptive input, but may experience postural fatigue and dislike endurance activities requiring sustained muscular effort, such as swimming or hiking. In such cases, jumping on a trampoline (with a net and adult supervision to avoid overload of sensory input) may be an option to provide them with much needed alerting and grounding input.

**Cycling:** Cycling is a great activity to work on balance, postural control, motor planning and attention. Training wheels may be needed for beginners, or alternately, using a tandem bike with an adult may be an option for individuals who do not yet have the skills to cycle independently.

**Jumping Rope:** This activity develops motor planning, coordination, sequencing, and visual-motor timing.

**Horseback Riding:** In addition to facilitating tone regulation, postural stability and endurance, balance and coordination, horseback riding provides rhythmic proprioceptive and movement input that is generally calming and organizing. As well, there is the therapeutic benefit of interacting/taking care of the animal, which can be a strong motivator for some children.

Consult your occupational therapist if you need guidance in choosing appropriate activities with respect to the developmental level and sensory needs of your child. Have a wonderful summer playing outside and having fun!!!

Joëlle Hadaya, erg.

Occupational Therapist

