

Building the tool box: Lying and stealing

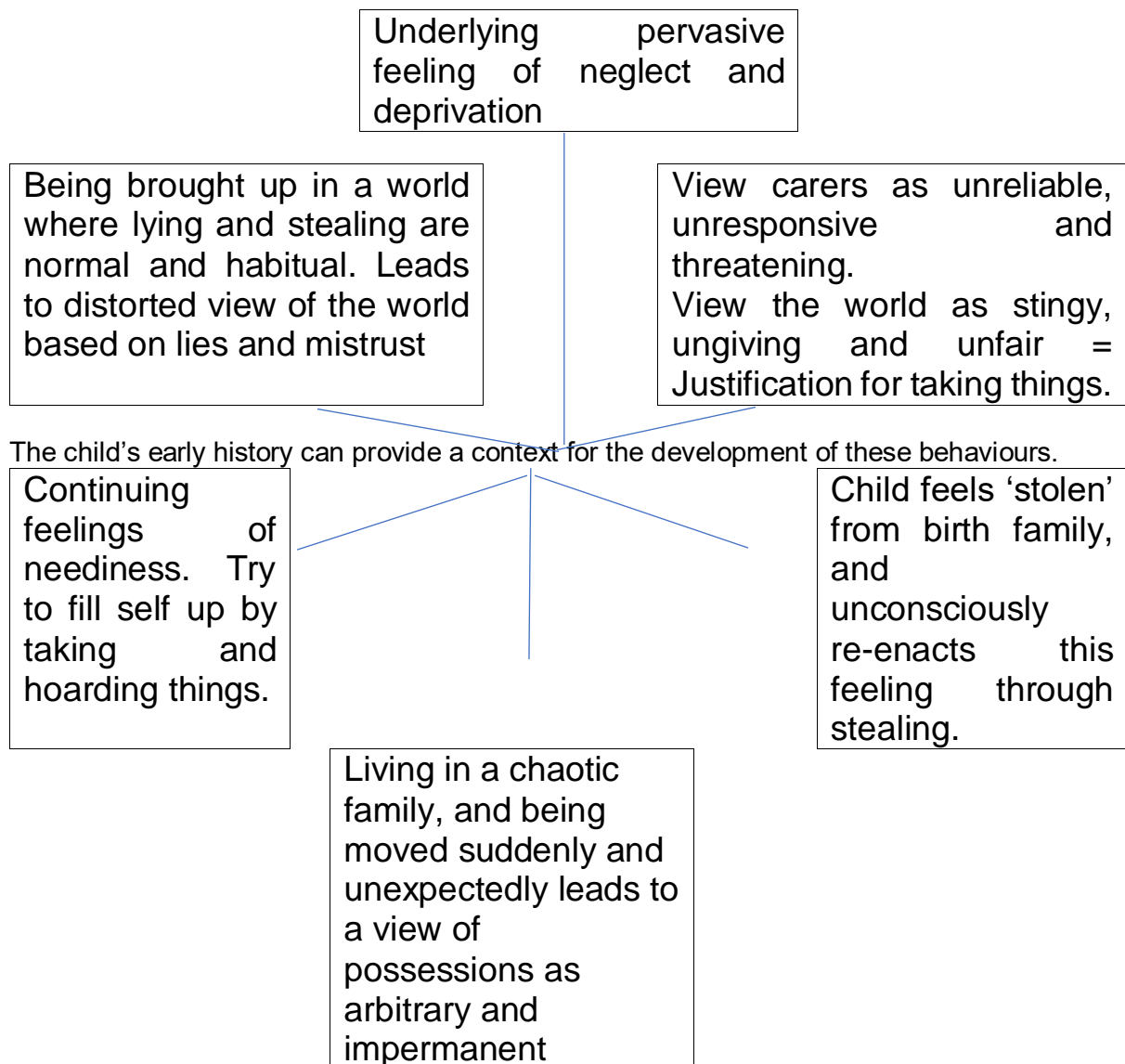
According to researchers lying and stealing are some of the most frequently observed behaviour problems in children who have been abused or neglected early in life.

Lying

- The child lies with audacity and is extremely convincing
- The child is able to look you straight in the eye whilst lying.
- The child may provide long and incredible explanations of what really happened
- The child may push the blame onto someone else.

Stealing

- Often it is low value or worthless items that are stolen
- Stealing for the sake of stealing and not for material gain.
- Often stolen items are hoarded rather than used.
- Food can commonly be stolen and hoarded or eaten.



Poor early development can lead to developmental delays: -

- Weakly formed sense of conscience
- Poor at thinking about cause and effect
- Concrete thinking

- Poor at knowing how we are thinking

These delays mean that the children are poor at seeing things from your point of view.

They find it difficult to see how you would view an event e.g. that seeing sweet wrappers under the bed will mean you know they have taken the sweets.

They will also find it difficult to think about how you would feel about their behaviour. E.g. if I take jewellery you will be upset.

Why do children lie and steal?

- To cover tracks – fear of punishment
- To build self up in other's Eyes e.g. fantasy
- To protect self
- To keep carers at a distance (maintains psychological distance)
- Protects privacy of thoughts, feelings and action.
- Don't trust enough to tell the truth
- Reflexive, unconscious need to conceal self (relates to distrust, need to protect privacy of thought, feelings and actions).
- Learned behaviour – becomes habitual
- As passive–aggressive act. Can be a way to express angry feelings towards others for a child who fears displaying such feelings openly.
- To control – fooling others, satisfying/rewarding in itself.
- Can enjoy the conflict as they get into an argument over whether they lied/stole or not.
- Self-deceit – denying unpleasant or even painful realities. Can be convinced that lies are true.
- Disconnects self from what really happened (dissociative response) – Coping strategy to avoid feelings of shame and guilt. Believe they are telling the truth to avoid feeling they have done something wrong.

Coping with intense feelings of badness and low self-worth – Deny all mistakes, weakness or transgressions.

- May feel that telling the truth will be punished. e.g. losing family following disclosure.

what can we do?

- Model honest behaviour – how to admit to a mistake, not lying yourself.
- Avoid confrontation – did you or didn't you lie. Deal with behaviour leading to the lie.
- Avoid putting child into role of liar e.g. by asking the child to admit to something known
- When you do want to talk to the child about lying do this when you are feeling calm. Show child your support and belief that s/he can be honest.
- Look for non-verbal communication, comment on it. E.g. your eyes / your shoulders are telling me.
- Provide calm consequences without irritation or anger. Use natural consequences when possible.
- Be very consistent and predictable.
- Good communication within family and with outside contacts.
- Encourage everyone to look after own things.
- When child shows no remorse – remember the feelings of shame are buried deep – over time you will help the child face that shame without becoming overwhelmed.

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