



CASE STUDY #10: SEAN (Liar, Liar Pants on Fire)

We've dealt with our share of pathological liars over the past 37 years. We define this behavior as telling falsehoods when it's easier to tell the truth, Mark Twain said it best with his observation: "When you tell the truth you never have to remember what you said." We all stretch the truth or exaggerate sometimes but these kids (and many politicians) elevate prevarication to an art form. A few weeks ago one of our group members asked me to give an example of when it's OK to lie. I responded: "When someone's feelings might get hurt by the truth; example...When my wife asks "Do these pants make my butt look big" Only a fool answers this one truthfully!

In "I CARE" we value the truth as the entry point to trust. Our kids need to be able to trust us and each other. Like love, we believe that you can't trust anyone else until you can trust yourself.

A few of our best "truth stretchers" have come up with some classics: Sean claimed to be working as a mole for the FBI. to bring down a drug lord. When we challenged the veracity of this story based upon the obvious danger of the mission and the fact that the government couldn't possibly assume the liability involved with the risk of this plan. Like any well trained liar he had a response at the ready: "That's what makes it work so well."

Every week Sean would come to a group filled with tall tails of his involvement in some kind of adventure for which he expected to be treated to special consideration in whatever we were doing. In basic psychology classes we differentiate between the "ideal self" and the "actual self" as a way of looking at self deception and ownership. One of the most frequently occurring school based self deceptions by our clients is around grades. We've worked with hundreds of kids who consistently overestimate their academic success. "I aced that test...I'm sure I got at least a "B". When the graded test is returned the "B" is often missing that little horizontal line in the middle; "How could she give me a "D" (Notice the lack of ownership?) Maybe the "actual self" didn't work as hard as the "ideal self thought?"

Analysis: We make it a practice of never kicking anyone out of a group because we refuse to buy into their "blame game" which makes us the persecutor to their victim. This little game of "Gotcha" works so well for them in regular interactions with authority figures that we want to rise above and take away the game. Just because they give up on themselves doesn't mean that we must join in. Why play games where everyone loses?

NOTE: This last paragraph jolted my memory from a book I read 50 years ago entitled "The 50 minute hour". Robert Lindner, the author, shared case studies of four clients from his clinical practice. The one I found most intriguing was about a man who had created a fantasy world into which he was rapidly using as an escape from his own pathetic existence. After a couple of sessions the Doctor started taking copious notes about the imagined world. In each new session he would quote "facts" from his client's imagination. With this inclusion he expected to get closer to his client thereby perhaps making inroads to slowly reel his unsuspecting patient back into reality. The surprising result was the client's angry rant; "You can't be in my world! There isn't room for two in this fantasy!" (Didn't see that coming did you?...me neither!)