KIDS THAT STEAL

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Honesty is always the best policy is the prime message to teach kids. There are times when children and teens steal or take things or ideas that don’t belong to them. Your approach as a parent or teacher will depend on many things including age, the situation, the impact and the frequency. Let’s look further at why some kids steal, how we can promote honesty and what to do when kids steal.

Some reasons for stealing

Age-related: Stealing is more common in pre-school aged kids as they don’t have sufficient understanding of private property, or may lack sufficient impulse control. ‘I see, I want, I get’ is common for many young children. Parents then need to reinforce and remind children (using appropriate language) about private ownership (“That toy belongs to the kinder. Other children play with it too.”) and that’s wrong to take something without paying for it.

Primary school children and teenagers have an understanding that stealing is wrong but can take things due to a number of factors such as peer pressure, the thrill of taking risks, rebelling or lack of impulse control.

Modelling: Some children learn to steal by copying the significant adults in their lives. Honesty is best learnt by observing the honest behaviours of parents and teachers.

Reflect problems at home or in their lives: Sometimes kids steal as way of getting attention, or retaliating against a situation that is not to their liking. Also some teenagers may steal to support a drug habit.

Greed: There are some children who steal simply because they don’t have the money to buy something, nor the motivation to save.

A habit: Sometimes kids steal things from others so much that it has become an ingrained habit. They become good at it, and find that it’s an easy thing to do.

Preventative measures

Modelling: Make sure kids see you value honesty by being honest in all dealings with people.

Discuss why stealing is wrong: Trust and reliability are central issues to reinforce with kids who steal. Relate the behaviour back to them so they can personalise it. “How would you feel if someone took your football?” “How do you think your friend felt when you took his favourite toy?”

Teach kids how to get what they want: Give kids the tools to get what they want without stealing. These include; asking for something, negotiating (give & take) and setting goals, and saving money to buy the things they want.

Reinforce honest behaviours: Catch kids being honest so they see that these behaviours are worthwhile. Also recognise that sometimes being honest is hard. It’s about teaching kids what’s right, not what’s easy!