RESPONDING TO KIDS’ STEALING

Your response will depend on whether stealing is a one-off event or whether it’s habitual. If it is infrequent then consider the following responses:

- **Match your response to the situation.** Make sure you don’t over-react, thinking that you are now raising a career criminal because a child took her sister’s favourite dress! Similarly, avoid under-reacting, or doing nothing, thinking that stealing is just a stage they are going through. The longer that the behaviour goes uncorrected the more difficult it is to change.

- **Look for a reason:** Try to ascertain a reason for stealing: is it an angry response to something happening at home, or is it simply due to old-fashioned greed? Talk with your child to see what he or she has to say.

- **Remind:** While kids will often know that stealing is wrong, you may still need to remind them that what they have done is wrong, and reinforce the impact that stealing has on them (people won’t trust them) and on others (ranging from annoying to devastating).

- **Facing up:** Help kids to face up to what they have done by returning the object(s) in person to the person, or store where stealing occurred. The notion of facing up can emphasise the personal nature and harmful impact of stealing.

- **Fixing things:** When an item stolen can’t be returned, a child can make some type of restitution in terms of payment, or part payment of stolen goods. This type of restitutions helps kids take responsibility for their behaviour.

- **Further consequences:** The issue of setting further consequences over and above restitution such as grounding a child is a vexed question. It can sometimes be deemed as punishment and can undo the work that restitution may do. If further consequences are imposed they need to be done in a reasonable and respectful way so that kids learn from the experience. Exercise good judgment here.

- **Help kids earn money:** Give kids some purchasing power by providing pocket-money or helping them get a part-time job, if they are old enough. Giving kids the means to purchase items can encourage goal-setting and more legitimate ways of getting what they want.

**Habitual stealing**

If a child continues to steal consider getting professional assistance. One third of young people who have been caught shoplifting more than once say that it’s hard to quit. They become good at it, and it becomes something that they do.

Consider talking to a doctor, counsellor, therapist or mental health professional to help get to the cause of the problem, and to develop a planned approach to the problem.