

Liar, Liar

10 Ways You Can Tell if Someone is Lying



By Faith Wood

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People lie. It's a fact of life. They lie to gain advantage, to divert attention, or to cover up illegal or unethical behavior and actions.

People lie because they're passive aggressive, or to avoid admitting they made a mistake or are at fault. The reasons people lie are as varied as the people themselves. While we can't keep people from lying, we can be more aware of whether someone might be lying.

The truth is we all lie from time to time to save hurt feelings, to protect ourselves from social shame, or to avoid confrontations. Some of us feel forced to lie, or lie because we're uncomfortable with the truth, or because it's socially acceptable to "fudge" the truth to save face or to keep from embarrassing someone in public. Unfortunately some people lie deliberately.

There is no method that can prove with 100% accuracy that someone is lying. Professional liars tend to be really good at lying. Most people aren't practiced deceivers, so with practice you can learn to tell if someone is indeed lying. After that it's up to you to determine whether or not to confront the person. You can simply use the information to protect yourself, or you can take other steps to find out the truth.

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There are many, many indicators you can watch for to determine if someone is lying, but here are 10 basic and easy to learn signs to be aware of.

No one sign is proof of lying, but three or more signs may be a strong indication someone is lying. To be accurate it's important to establish a "base line."

A base line is how a person behaves when they are telling the truth. Interacting with people day-to-day makes it easier to determine a base line.

With strangers you may need to talk about something you know to be true, or know they will not lie about in order to determine base line behaviors - such as a hobby or other non-essential topic.

1. Liars will make little or no eye contact.
2. Liars will move away from their questioner.
3. Liars respond to questions with delays or deflecting questions or remarks.
4. Liars use words in non-sensical and indirect ways.
5. Liars sweat.
6. Liars exaggerate or use too many unnecessary details.
7. Gestures and expressions don't match.
8. Expressions are limited to the mouth area.
9. Guilty people get defensive, innocent people go on the offensive.
10. Liars will touch their face when talking.

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[1] Liars will make little or no eye contact.

People who lie tend to make little or no eye contact. But be careful, for some cultures eye contact is considered rude, so avoiding eye contact may be a way of showing respect. Native Americans, Asian and some third world countries tend to regard direct eye contact, particularly from child to adult, as rude. Liar's eyes will move around a lot to avoid meeting your gaze, or they'll stare directly at you for longer than normal because they know eye movements can be a give-away that they're lying.

[2] Liars will move away from their questioner.

A liar will typically try to move away from the person who is questioning or accusing them. They will tend to move either in the direction of an exit, or towards some place where they can put something between them and the person they're lying to. They are uncomfortable with standing with their shoulders square to their questioner. If a person can't place something like a desk or wall between himself and another, he may place other objects, like a book, drinking glass, or plate between himself and the questioner.

[3] Liars respond to questions with delays or deflecting questions or remarks.

Honest answers come quickly because they come from memory. Liars will delay their response for a few seconds, or respond with a deflecting question in order to think of or make up a fake story or answer. A liar may answer your questions, but will change the subject as soon as possible to avoid getting into an awkward conversation where he will have to tell more lies. For every lie a liar tells he has to tell two more to make the one lie believable.

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[4] Liars use words in non-sensical and indirect ways.

People who are lying may sound non-sensical or use incorrect grammar. While their minds are racing for answers their mouths are trying to fill up the time and space and distract their questioner - resulting in non-sensical answers or the wrong use of words. They are also deliberately indirect so they can change their answers later if their lies don't work out. They don't want to be held to a direct answer or statement because it's too easy to get caught in a lie if they provide specific information that can be examined.

[5] Liars sweat.

Liars are nervous. They don't want to be discovered. They sweat because they're tense, nervous and fearful of being found out. Sweating is so common among liars that lie detection machines are designed to pick up on this sweating. Depending on the situation you're in, it may be difficult to observe sweating, but look for moisture on the upper lip or forehead.

[6] Liars exaggerate or use too many unnecessary details.

Liars may volunteer unnecessary details in an effort to either comfort the listener, or to ensure their story is believed. Too many unnecessary details may tip you off to the fact they are lying. Some people just like to talk, but if lengthy, detailed chatter isn't part of their base line behavior, they may be lying.

[7] Gestures and expressions don't match.

People who are lying will often tend to hide the palms of their hands - either by putting their hands in their pockets, making a fist, or holding something in their hands.

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They may pick up a coffee cup, shuffle papers on their desk, or take out their cell phone or calendar or some other item. Their physical movements - particularly their arms, hands and legs, will tend to move stiffly and more awkwardly since they aren't telling the truth.

[8] Expressions are limited to the mouth area.

Most of us have seen it - the big smile with flat eyes. The person is smiling, but we get the feeling they're not really happy. Fake smiles are what people wear when they know a smile is needed or expected, such as showing gratitude for a gift, posing for a photo, or lying about their feelings or a situation. In a real smile the muscles of the entire face, including the eyes, forehead, cheeks and mouth are engaged.

[9] Guilty people get defensive, innocent people go on the offensive.

People who are lying will often use sarcasm or get defensive when confronted or questioned. Honest people will go on the offensive when accused of lying. Liars will attempt to direct the conversation away from the thing they are lying about, respond by using your question to answer your question. Honest people will respond with anger, not with defensiveness.

[10] Liars will touch their face when talking.

People who are lying will often instinctively touch the area around their lower face - such as scratching their nose, touching their mouth or lips. The hands are used to stop the lie from coming out. If people touch the back of their neck or head - that movement can be a sign of nervousness and not deceit. But the nervousness could be related to the fact they're lying as well.

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Suspicious Behaviors:

There are other things to look for when detecting lies. Suspicious behaviors, such as a change in the tone of voice can also be indicators or “tells” that should tip you off that something is going on.

By themselves, each of these behaviors can just be signs of stress, or even a person's natural mannerisms. One can occur by chance, but when two or more of these behaviors suddenly appear at a moment when lying could be expedient, pay attention.

For example, when you ask a salesman how reliable that used car is and you notice two or more of these behaviors, it suggests he's lying.

Look for several indicators and don't forget to establish a baseline of behavior so you have something to compare the tell against. Additional behaviors to look for:

- A change in the voice's pitch. High pitches are a sign of nervousness.
- A change in the rate of speech can be telling on many levels. If they were talking slow and are now ramping up the pace (and vice versa) - that's a good sign that the limbic system is in hyper drive. The limbic system is responsible for the adrenaline in our bodies.
- A sudden increase in the number of "ums" and "ahs."
- They were not doing it and now they are means they are searching for more info. If you take the pressure off by changing the subject does it stop?

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- A change in eye contact. Normally, one makes eye contact about 70% of the time. If suddenly, at the convenient moment to lie, he's staring at you or looking away, beware.
- Turning her body away from you, even if just slightly when she wasn't before.
- Suddenly being able to see the white on the top and bottom of a person's eyes, not just the sides.
- A hand reaching, even if momentarily, to cover part of the face, especially the mouth.
- Nervous movement of feet or legs.

You can also watch for signs of defensiveness - tucked chin, dropped shoulder or shoulders, desire to make oneself very very small - this is a tactic deployed when the limbic system becomes involved. The limbic system moves us to fight, flight or freeze. When there is no place to run, we will begin to adopt a strategy of making ourselves very small!

Watch for flushing in the face that did not appear earlier. This is also a classic sign of discomfort - akin to sweating. If a person is pushed and becomes angry and aggressively defensive - the colour will drain from their face.

Finally, look for body inconsistencies. They may be saying "No," but their heads are bobbing "Yes." When someone's telling the truth, their words, face and body language are all congruent.

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