

It doesn't matter how many people are saying something, believing it to be true or communicating it to the world – we still need to have our own level of evaluation to determine what is and isn't true. Also, as we grow older we realise that you cannot be too informed. The more one makes oneself knowledgeable about the world around us, the more accurate are the filters we have through which to sift new information and communication to decide our willingness to believe, or not.

Some false communication comes about because of naivete, ignorance or blind faith. However, children also need to know that there are people in the world who are sometimes tempted to spread or disseminate things which are not true – because they believe it will bring them personal gain and that the dishonesty is legitimate and justifiable in the pursuit of their goals. Young people also need to learn that if they pass on information they hear without proper verification, they can be party to causing a great deal of hurt or harm.

I believe that one of the best tools for teaching children about the importance of truthfulness, integrity and honesty is the concept of the emotional bank account. Developed by the late Stephen Covey (best known for the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People), the concept suggests that every time we prove to someone that we are trustworthy and honest, it is like putting a deposit in the emotional bank account that exists within that relationship. However, when someone comes to know that we have been dishonest, told a lie or acted with low integrity that represents a withdrawal from the emotional bank account. The bigger the betrayal or extent of the dishonesty, the bigger the withdrawal.

Any child can quickly grasp the concept and work out that if we make multiple withdrawals on the emotional bank account it gets drained, until in the worst case, it goes in to deficit. Then, if an emergency arises or an important situation occurs where we really need someone to believe or trust us, there is no balance in the account to draw on. The child realizes that dishonesty carries a cost in the longer term that merits caution when the temptation comes to achieve short term

gain through low trust behavior.

There are other vital things we need to do for our children. Firstly, we can make it a point to draw their attention to successful people in various fields who succeed ethically, who build their public persona on integrity and are known for their truthfulness.

Next – and here comes the tough one – we can make extra effort to be exemplary role models ourselves. Our children should hear and see us making deposits in the emotional bank accounts of our relations, even when it is hard to do. When we make promises and commitments to our children, we need to do everything in our power to follow through and keep those promises. If I have promised my child that I will be there for a dance performance and an emergency comes up in my workplace, I have a difficult decision to make. If, every time I put my work before my child there is going to be a price to pay for those broken promises. If necessary, apply the business maxim – 'under promise, over deliver.' If the worst comes to the worst and we do break our promise, we have to be willing to apologise fully and genuinely to our child. We need to acknowledge the hurt that it may have caused and give our commitment that the next time will be different.

So, ultimately, did the world change? Does the truth no longer matter? Is this really a "post truth" age? I don't believe so. I don't believe integrity has become unfashionable. Those who take the route of short-term expediency will pay the price ultimately. Times of ambiguity and uncertainty become times when we need to invest even more of our energy in ensuring that our children get the right messages – the ones that will set them up to live lives that are fulfilling, successful and purposeful.

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