

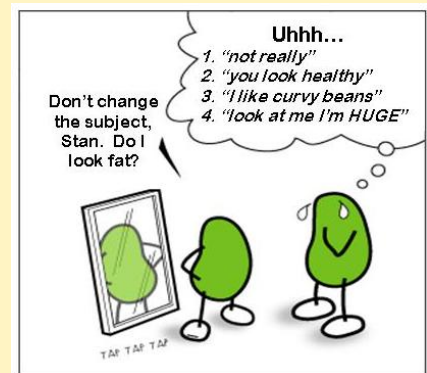
Pondering Point

Most of us have been taught from an early age that lying is bad. We learn that untruths tear apart relationships by damaging intimacy and trust. As we get older we discover that there may be levels to lying. We call some lies “white lies.” Why do they call it a *white* lie? Perhaps if white is a symbol of innocence, this form of lying is intended to be innocent. Does that make all other lies *black*? **Is lying only a black or white way of thinking or is there a gray area?** When we think about ethics, are there lies that can be considered acceptable to tell?

What do we do when someone asks us a question and we know they will not be able to handle our response? Being put on the spot means we have no time to evaluate and decide the best reply. We may tell a white lie to spare someone’s feelings or to avoid an awkward social situation. Are we protecting these people, or simply lying to them? We may avoid the question with another question or unrelated response. Is deflection the same as deception? What is the cost, or emotional fallout, of telling someone like it is? What are the costs of telling a white lie? We may find that some people can handle the truth while others cannot.

Does this make me look FAT?

Are there some lies that are acceptable to tell?



Imagine... understanding the costs of what you tell someone.

— From Pondering to Practice —

Activity

Come up with a few fictitious scenarios (personal and professional) in which people have chosen to tell a white lie or deflected an awkward conversation.

Discuss with the group:

- *What was the white lie?*
- *Why do you think they chose to tell a lie?*
- *How might the situation be different had they told the truth?*
- *What are some possible implications the lie might have?*

“Those who think it is permissible to tell white lies soon grow color-blind.”

- Austin O'Malley

“Respect for the truth is an acquired taste.”

- Mark Van Doren

Self Reflection Activity

What is the difference between a white lie and a black lie? Where is the line?

Think of a situation when you told someone a white lie.

- *Why did you choose not to be truthful?*
- *What happened after the lie?*
- *Has a stretched truth ever snapped back in your face?*
- *Has it ever snowballed into more lies and gotten out of control?*
- *Have you ever deflected from an awkward situation by avoiding the question?*
- *Did that help or hinder you through that moment?*