

Introduction

“Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom.”

—Thomas Jefferson

Problem behavior is not always determined by the behavior itself, but rather by the frequency of the behavior. Many children stretch the truth, engage in “cooperative learning” when individual learning is called for, or “borrow” something that does not belong to them. However, at some point the behavior of most children is shaped by society such that they infrequently lie, cheat, or steal. For other children, both the frequency and intensity of inappropriate behavior increases over time causing problems.

Lying, cheating, and stealing are common in that these behaviors all involve deception. In lying we are using verbal behavior to deceive; in cheating we are using written behavior to deceive; and in stealing we are using motor behavior to take something that we do not own. Deception can have profound ramifications for the student. At one level, the student may hurt those who are close. Deception typically involves betraying trust that has been developed over time. There are also legal implications for deceptive behavior. Stealing is illegal. Many schools also have codes that address cheating behavior and plagiarism. Teachers are encouraged to consult their school’s policy handbook regarding these behaviors before developing a behavior change plan to address these problems.

Steps for Modifying Behavior

In another book in this series, *How To Help Students Remain Seated*, Axelrod (2003) outlines a series of steps teachers can follow to change student behavior. These steps are generic to any behavior change program.