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# Why We Lie to Ourselves

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By Rosemary Black

[In order to grow, you have to be honest with yourself. Here's how to get back on track.](#)

Nearly everyone is guilty of being less than honest with themselves at some point. It's an easy behavior to fall into, and can be a hard habit to break.

"Lying to yourself is a defense mechanism, designed to help keep us going when things get tough," says Tina B Tessina, Ph. D., author of *It Ends with You: Grow Up and Out of Dysfunction*. Unfortunately, she says, lying to yourself often works against you.

In a relationship, for instance, it can encourage one partner (or both) to stay together in a bad place for far too long, says Lisa Rene Reynolds, Ph D, author of *Parenting through Divorce: Helping Your Kids Thrive During and After the Split*.

"Their 'hopefulness' or denial of what's going on gets in the way of detrimental things like abuse, cheating, or lack of respect," she says. "We need to encourage people to challenge their own perceptions, examine all the possible motives and fears, and then consider a myriad of options for dealing with it."

Lying to oneself is a form of denial that helps one's ego to survive, says Mary Jo Rapini, M. Ed., LPC. "People lie to themselves about their weight, their drinking, and other unhealthy things they do," she says.

Sometimes, individuals may lie to themselves because of basic insecurity, Tessina says.

If you're in the habit of lying to yourself, can you come clean with yourself? Here's how to start.

**1. Talk to yourself.** "You need to start having conversations with yourself, as you would with a child you suspect of lying or have caught lying," Tessina says. "It's important to be gentle with yourself, but sort out the truth from the fact."

**2. Do a reality check.** You may need a wake-up call to start being realistic with yourself, Rapini says. "Many times, it takes a serious illness such as heart disease for people to come to the truth of how badly they have let their diet and body go," she says. "It's hard for a person to stop lying to herself until she is strong enough to see that everyone is flawed to some degree. When you stop criticizing yourself and stop expecting perfection, you can be more honest with yourself."

**3. Accept that there will be bad times.** While it may be easy to tell yourself a lie to keep your feelings in check or your relationship with someone intact, accept that you may simply have to face disappointment, hurt and rejection, says April Masini, who pens an advice column called Ask April. "You can and will overcome these feelings," she says. "Don't tell yourself that you can't get divorced or that you can't accept his cheating. If you are lying to yourself, chances are you're trying to avoid something that you don't like about yourself or your relationship."

**4. Learn from your mistakes.** "Look at any successful person and I guarantee they've learned from some hard mistakes," Masini says. "They may have pulled the wool over their eyes, but then they stopped lying to themselves and started doing things differently."