

Stealing

Children commonly try to steal toys, food, or money from parents, friends, or a store. Before age 4 or 5, children don't understand "ownership." Prior to that they consider everything "mine." Fortunately, they can't conceal stealing well during these early years.

The Rule

Clarify your expectation. "Don't take things that don't belong to you, because the person they belong to will miss them and feel sad."

Discipline Technique

If your child steals something, respond as follows:

- Have your child take the stolen object back to the teacher, storekeeper, friend, or other rightful owner. The embarrassment of doing this, especially with you present, often prevents future stealing.
- If the stolen object has been broken or the food has been consumed, help your child think of ways to earn money to pay the owner back.
- It's smart to be suspicious when your child suddenly "finds" a new possession. And it's good if you catch your child stealing at a young age. The sooner he learns that stealing doesn't work, the easier it will be for him to give it up.
- Praise your child for honesty and be a model of honesty yourself.

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