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ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY 12

Detecting Lies

Directions: Read the following material then answer the questions on a separate sheet of paper.

Do you remember a time as a child that you told a lie to your parents and were surprised that they could so quickly identify it as a lie? What gave you away? You may have made your lie so obvious that any adult could have detected it. For example, you may have blamed a broken glass on an imaginary friend. Your parents had no trouble recognizing this illogical statement as a lie. Adults who lie are not as easy to detect. For purposes of this discussion, lying should be considered an intentional act, not an accident or a piece of bad advice.

Your friend, Steve, has just joined you and two other friends. You ask him if he has seen your gym bag, which has your new pair of shoes in it. Steve looks at the floor as he answers that he has not seen the bag. Does looking at the floor indicate that he is lying, or is he looking at the floor because he is concentrating to try to remember the last time he saw you with the gym bag?

Assume you are the assistant manager at a specialty retail store. You are responsible for interviewing and hiring new sales associates. During an interview, you ask Teresa why she left her last job. She tightens her lips and speaks haltingly as she responds that the last place she worked did not give her enough hours. Do the tightened lips and halting speech indicate a lie or do they simply show nervousness?

Researchers have found that many behaviors signal deception. Refusing to make eye contact when answering a question is a common indicator of lying in our culture. That does not mean that Steve was lying to you, but his behavior does increase the chances that he was. Tightening one's lips and inserting long pauses into your speech may also indicate lying.

Researcher Paul Ekman reports on studies of patients with different kinds of brain damage. The studies show that voluntary facial expressions are controlled by a different part of the brain than involuntary expressions. Voluntary expressions are those that we can control. Involuntary expressions occur without conscious thought about them. A few voluntary and involuntary facial expressions are shown in the following table.

Voluntary Facial Expressions	Involuntary Facial Expressions
a forced smile to someone you do not really like	look of disgust when you smell a foul odor
rolling your eyes at a joke that is not very funny	a smile when you are tickled
winking across a room at someone you like	opening your eyes widely when you are afraid

No one knows the precise number of facial expressions because there are so many subtle variations. Expressions vary not only among the basic emotions, but also with the intensity and duration of the emotion. For example, when a person is angry he or she may be mildly annoyed or enraged. The expressions for these extremes will vary greatly.

When people lie, they often try to mask the deception with voluntary facial expressions. With all but the most expert liars, however, they often give themselves away with involuntary facial expressions. These expressions may last only a fraction of a second. People like police officers are trained to notice these brief expressions, and researchers say that with practice, most people can learn to recognize these involuntary expressions.

Paul Ekman, in *Telling Lies: Clues to Deceit in the Marketplace, Politics, and Marriage,* identifies two specific types of facial expressions that most people can learn to detect: micro expressions and

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squelched expressions. Micro expressions last for less than one-quarter of a second. They are involuntary expressions that pass over a person's face quickly as the person is displaying a voluntary expression. People can be trained to detect these micro expressions by watching videos of people being interviewed. During training, the video is slowed to the point where the expression can be pointed out. People watch the videos at slow speeds as they are learning to recognize micro expressions. After about an hour of training, most people can detect these expressions when the video is run at normal speed. By practicing with different faces, most people can easily recognize these expressions.

Squelched expressions occur when a person realizes that his or her face is displaying an unintended emotion. For example, you may begin to smile when someone in class answers a question incorrectly. You do not want the person to feel bad, so you squelch the smile and replace it with a look of sympathy. Although squelched expressions last longer than micro expressions, they are often more difficult to detect. They are usually quickly covered with another expression and the observer may not be able to detect the actual emotion that was being expressed. If you think a person is lying to you and you detect the start of a smile, you will likely assume that the person was starting to form a sneer. You do not really know, however, if the expression would have become a sneer or some other type of smile.

You can often detect lies by watching for micro and squelched expressions. Some people, however, can display similar micro and squelched expressions when they are suspected of lying. For example, someone has accused you of rear-ending a car in the school's parking lot. When you are questioned about it, you tell the principal that you did not do it. Your face, however, may display flashes of expression that are similar to those of someone who is lying. Your actual emotion may be disbelief or anger at being falsely accused. Although these expressions can provide clues, they do not provide conclusive proof of deceptive behavior.

Questions

Directions: Answer the following questions in the space provided.

1. Complete the following table by listing five voluntary and five involuntary expressions.

Voluntary Facial Expressions	Involuntary Facial Expressions

2. If you learned to detect micro expressions and squelched expressions, how else could you use this skill besides detecting lies?

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3. Describe an experiment to test the hypothesis that people's eyes and mouths are the most likely facial features to reveal lies.

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