LYING HURTS YOUR HEALTH
By Marlene and Bob Neufeld

A study presented at the American Psychological Association's 120th Annual Convention stated that telling the truth can significantly improve a person's mental and physical health. The study, called the "Science of Honesty" study, was conducted over 10 weeks.

"Recent evidence indicates that Americans average about 11 lies per week. We wanted to find out if living more honestly can actually cause better health," said lead author Anita E. Kelly, PhD. "We found that the participants could purposefully and dramatically reduce their everyday lies, and that in turn was associated with significantly improved health."

"For example, when participants in the no-lie group told three fewer white lies than they did in other weeks, they experienced on average about four fewer mental-health complaints, such as feeling tense or melancholy, and about three fewer physical complaints, such as sore throats and headaches. The pattern was similar for major lies."

Some study "participants said they realized they could simply tell the truth about their daily accomplishments rather than exaggerate, while others said they stopped making false excuses for being late or failing to complete tasks" Kelly said.

As the study went on the no-lie group improved. "Compared to the control group, participants in the more truthful group told significantly fewer lies across the 10-week study, and by the fifth week, they saw themselves as more honest."

Kelly also noted the connection between good relationships and better health. She said the researchers' findings "support the notion that lying less can cause better health through improving relationships."

Our teachers, Drs. Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks, have been advocating emotional transparency and speaking authentically for over 30 years. They consider honesty as both an aid to getting a good night's sleep as well as an aphrodisiac.

Withholding is a major form of lying, in the form of exaggerating or minimizing, or just not telling. People often think that they are saving their loved ones stress by withholding things that will upset them. They are trying to manage their partner's feelings, and, of course, make it easier on themselves (so they won't have to deal with the impact of their partner's feelings). However, withholding creates distance. Partners notice this energetically. They may not know what it is that is being withheld, but they sense that something is going on, and then they make up stories (often more extreme than the truth).

We, ourselves, advocate expressing and revealing to our clients, especially those who have lost a sense of aliveness and/or desire for each other. Revealing can bring closeness especially when a conscious container is created. The container could be something like, "I have something I want to talk about, is this a good time?" or "I have something I want to say, and I'm afraid of your reaction, would you be willing to just listen?" If both people have committed to generous listening, expressing and revealing can bring greater connection.

Now, don't get us wrong, stopping lying doesn't mean you can go around spewing blame and critical thoughts at each other. And putting "I feel…" in front of a blame statement doesn't make it more honest. Saying "you're a slob" or even "I feel like you're a slob" is not an example of speaking authentically.

We have a poster on our office wall that says, "Don't believe everything you think." Stopping lying needs to go hand-in-hand with learning how to communicate the unarguable truth (for more about this concept see the articles on our website on honesty, emotional literacy, generous listening and revealing).

We challenge you to notice your own lies, and to do your own experiment. Rate your emotional and physical health, as well as the health of your relationship with the important people in your life and then try a no-lie week. Notice the results. If you have something that you are afraid to reveal, get a reputable therapist or coach or trusted friend to hold space while you do it.