

**Imagination, Lying and Confabulation**  
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**I. What's the difference? A lie is a lie, right? ... NO**

- A. Imagination – generating an idea, may be true or false
- B. Lying – intentionally misleading someone else
- C. Confabulation – “honest lying” - telling an incorrect answer or an untrue story, but the speaker believes it is true so they are not intentionally lying

**II. Two main kinds of confabulation**

- A. Confabulation of Embarrassment - making up an answer based on past experience to cover for a lack of knowledge or memory
  - 1. answers are often coherent and possible, but incorrect
  - 2. answers often change with each interview and may lack the affective intensity that is often characteristic of delusional belief systems
  - 3. on the other hand, since they believe it is true, they may vigorously argue that it is true even if confronted with logic that contradicts it
- B. Fantastic Confabulation - spontaneous description of impossible, adventurous, and perhaps gruesome experiences
  - 1. less common in adults, may be somewhat common in children with ACC
  - 2. may seem more bizarre
  - 3. not part of a delusional system

**III. Why? Several possible causes ...**

- A. Memory
  - 1. Gap Filling – confabulation reflects an attempt to fill gaps in memory
  - 2. Defective Retrieval Processes – due to poor strategy for retrieving information, individual may be highly suggestible and utilize external cues for memory
  - 3. Poor Temporal Ordering - confabulations are the result of a confusion of the temporal order of information within memory (in spontaneous confab. – remembering two things together which don't really belong together)
- B. Memory and Executive Function
  - 1. Disinhibition – in combination with frontal lobe damage, individuals with memory impairment may not be able to inhibit their imaginary ideas
  - 2. Poor Self-Monitoring of memories and poor self-correction

### C. Emotional and Executive Function

1. Impaired Intuition - impairment in the circuitry that gives a “feeling of rightness” – may be due to poor use of or lack of autonomic feedback to know if something is true

## IV. Confabulation in those with ACC

### A. Examples

1. About the past
  - a. Telling parents he had no homework (when he did) followed by telling teachers that he was not able to do his homework because his parents wouldn't take him to the store to buy the paper he needed for the assignment (also not true).
  - b. Telling neighbor that he had been a designated driver for other students when the individual with ACC did not even have a driver's license.
  - c. Telling a former speech/language pathologist that he had gotten a job as an aide in a school when he had only had an interview and did not get the job.
  - d. Telling parents that he had paid off a debt when he had not.
  - e. Telling psychologist that he had had to give up his red Miata and lost his driver's license when he had never had either.
  - f. Telling a woman from Toronto he had just met that he had made a trip to her city, complete with details about that trip, when he had never been there. He then insisted he had made the trip to Toronto continuing to embellish the story when his mother confronted him with evidence to the contrary.
2. About the future
  - a. Telling parents he was going to use someone else's lawn mower for a job mowing a client's lawn and took the family lawn mower instead.
  - b. Telling parents repeatedly he is going to take a shower and then not taking one for days.

### B. Differences in interpretation for children versus adults

1. Some evidence suggests that young children **with** a corpus callosum confabulate.
2. Confabulation in child with ACC may be viewed as examples of a fantastic imagination. (For example, a child telling teacher that she has a horse when she does not.)
3. Confabulation that may be viewed as examples of imagination in a child are no longer tolerated by society when the child becomes an adolescent and later an adult. The people around that individual then change the label from “imagination” to “lying.”

### C. Pragmatic Concerns

1. Within the family
  - a. Parents who do not understand the individual with ACC is confabulating may persist in lecturing about the importance of telling the truth. When the lecturing and consequences for “lying” do not lead to change in behavior on the part of the child, parents may become very exasperated and angry.
  - b. Siblings who do not understand confabulation may want to keep their distance from the individual with ACC so they will not be judged as being liars by association. The sibling may come to view the individual as a “pathological liar.”
2. With peers
  - Trust is the basis for many friendships. Confabulation without understanding from peers automatically creates a barrier for close friendships. (“I can’t be friends with a person who lies.”)
3. With an employer
  - If the employer does not understand confabulation, a serious potential exists for the individual to be misjudged and even fired because of being “dishonest.” (“I can’t have a person who lies working with me.”)

### D. What can be done?

1. Consequences are not going to affect the faulty functioning of the brain. This is an organic issue over which the individual does not have control. What does not work:
  - a. Lecturing
  - b. Nagging
  - c. Punishment
2. What does work?
  - a. Educating other family members, peers, teachers, employers, and others in the world of the individual with ACC about the concept of confabulation.
  - b. Communicating with the others so that those surrounding the individual with ACC can “get the story straight” and act accordingly.

### E. How extensive is confabulation among those with ACC?

1. This question requires more observational data. We have reports of at least six adolescents and adults with ACC who exhibit possible confabulation. Are there more?
2. If you recognize examples of confabulation in your family member with ACC or other callosal anomaly, please write a description of the experience and send them to us.