

# Skill-Building Book Tips

## 7 Essential Life Skills

Explore *Liar & Spy* in a way that highlights Communicating, a Life Skill that promotes Executive Functions. This Life Skill is much more than understanding language, speaking, reading and writing. It's the skill of **determining what you want to communicate** and **realizing how our communications will be**.

### Tip

It becomes clear as the story unfolds that Safer and Georges misunderstand each other's view of the Spy Club. For Safer, it's about pretending to be courageous, and for Georges, it's a real life mystery, though he has to learn to be courageous, too. Ask your child whether or not she thinks it would have been possible to communicate their differences in the purpose of the Spy Club before Georges and Safer grew to trust each other.

### Skill

Honest and open communication has to be **built on trust**.

### Tip

Georges' father always wants Georges to open up. He says, "So? Tell me things." According to Georges, this is his father's way of "asking me to pour my heart out." But Georges holds things in for a long time, until he finally opens up and tells his father what's going on at school and in his relationship with Safer. Ask your child how she feels about the way Georges' father handled this situation.

### Skill

In your own back-and-forth conversation about Georges' relationship with his father, be a good role model for open communication between an adult and a child. This back-and-forth interaction is what researchers call "**Take-Turns Talk**." Like a game of ball, one of you says or does something and the other responds. The importance of these everyday interactions to brain building is a key finding from child development research.

### Tip

Georges and his mother communicate to each other through Scrabble letter messages. Toward the end of the book, we find out that Georges' mother is actually ill and in the hospital. The Scrabble communication between Georges and his mother was brief, but kept their connection strong. Ask your child what other ways we can communicate besides talking.

### *Liar & Spy*

**By Rebecca Stead**

Seventh-grader Georges moves into a new apartment building in Brooklyn and meets 12-year-old Safer, a coffee-drinking spy. Georges becomes his recruit to track a mysterious man, Mr. X, dressed all in black, who lives in the apartment above Georges. From there, many exciting adventures ensue. Through misunderstanding and communication, the friendship endures.



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### Skill

Communicating includes **body movements, reading, writing and symbols**. Being able to interpret other forms of communication helps your child become a better communicator.

### Tip

The symbol of dots appears in this book in many ways. The symbolism includes a museum poster by Georges Seurat (for whom Georges is named) that hangs in his living room. Georges' mother says a million different dots make up one gigantic picture, stressing that it's important to step back and look from afar at the big picture. His father counters that everyday details are important, too. In addition, Georges' mother tells the story of her first plane trip using the analogy of dots. And dots are part of the study of taste in school, and blue dots represent Georges' sports team. Ask your child:

- “What do you think ‘dots’ mean in *Liar & Spy*? Why are they such an important part of the story?”

The names of the people in the story also reveal important aspects of their characters—from Georges to Candy to Safer to Pigeon to Dallas to Bob English Who Draws (who becomes Bob as the story continues).

Ask your child:

- “Why do you think the author has chosen these names for the characters? What kind of feeling do these names elicit?”

### Skill

Communicating includes the **use of symbols**, which adds depth to what we want to say.

### Tip

Safer projects bravery when he's really scared. Talk with your child about a time when she misunderstood a situation because she didn't have all of the information. Ask her what could have been done to find out more.

### Skill

Understanding what others are communicating requires self-control—you have to set your own thoughts and feelings aside to truly understand others, which calls on Executive Function skills. By talking about similar situations with your child, you are offering him or her an opportunity to reflect and analyze and learn from past experiences.

These tips sheets were developed by *Mind in the Making*, in collaboration with First Book. Find more books and materials on the First Book Marketplace, a resource available exclusively to educators and programs serving children in need. **Visit: [www.fbmarketplace.org](http://www.fbmarketplace.org).**