



Exploring Leadership

PERSONAL LEADERSHIP: VALUES AND ETHICS

Issues like stealing, cheating, lying, bullying, and using drugs are all ethical dilemmas that teens may face, often driven by a desire for peer acceptance. But understanding your values and ethics can help you navigate these situations and make decisions that align with what truly matters to you. By learning to identify your core beliefs, you can avoid being swayed by others and prevent future regret.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

Think about a time when you were faced with a tough decision. What helped you make the right choice, and how did you feel afterward?

Values are beliefs about right and wrong, shaped by family, culture, religion, and community. Ethics are the standards we follow based on those values. Practicing ethics means living by our values, even when it's tough. Knowing your values gives you the strength to make the right decisions, especially under pressure.

KEY OBJECTIVES:

- Understand the difference between values and ethics.
- Identify your core values and the ethical behaviors that align with them.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Copies of "Ethical Dilemmas" for each group (see Appendix), cut apart
- Optional: Computer and projector or whiteboard to display the questions

EXPLORATION ACTIVITY:

In this activity, you'll work in groups to discuss ethical dilemmas and identify which values drive your choices. This will help you understand how to act with integrity in different situations.

FACILITATOR TIPS:

- Follow the rules. This teaches participants the value of committing fully to the task at hand.
- Keep an eye out for any signs of cheating, whether it's with hands or mouths.

- Divide participants into groups of 4-5. Then, space them apart so they can't hear other groups.
- Give each group a different ethical dilemma slip (found in the Appendix).
- Optional: Display the following questions on a projector or write them on the board.
- Allow each group 5 minutes to read and discuss the dilemma. They must answer these three questions:
 - What would they do in this situation?
 - Is this action ethical?
 - What value does their behavior show is most important (e.g., grades, friendship, honesty)?
- Afterward, bring everyone together and have each group share their responses to the ethical dilemma.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- When, if ever, is it ethical to copy homework or share answers?
- Did any part of the different scenarios change how you viewed the situation? Why or why not?
- Do you think people's actions change depending on the situation? What does this reveal about our values?
- Is it okay for someone's values to shift based on the situation? Why or why not?

APPLICATION DISCUSSION:

- Have you ever been in a situation like any of the ethical dilemmas? How did you handle it?
- Have you ever made a decision that went against your personal values? How did it feel afterward?
- Can you think of a time when you faced peer pressure or a difficult situation where your values were challenged? What did you do?
- Looking back, would you make the same decision again? Why or why not?



CONCLUSION:

To be a person of integrity, you must align your actions with your values. This isn't always easy, especially when faced with peer pressure or difficult situations. But practicing ethical behavior means standing true to your beliefs, even when it's hard. Next time you encounter an ethical dilemma, remember this lesson. By sticking to your values, you'll make decisions you can be proud of and avoid regret down the road.

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REFERENCES

- Teaching Values to Teens: <https://middleearthnj.org/2010/09/20/teaching-values-to-teens/>
- Tough Choices from Harvard: <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/16/03/tough-choices>



APPENDIX:

"Ethical Dilemmas"

The term ends next week, and you have a big homework assignment due in Geography. It includes three hours of reading the textbook and coloring maps. It's worth enough points to raise or drop your final grade. You need an A in the class to stay in the running for a scholarship, and right now, you have a B+. You spent extra time and effort on the assignment to make sure it's your best work, and you expect it to raise your grade to an A.

At lunch, your best friend sits next to you and asks to copy your work because they didn't finish the assignment. They remind you that you once asked them for a favor on a much smaller assignment. Then they say, "If I don't get a good score on this, I'll get a D in the class, and I won't be able to run for student office. Please, you've gotta help me out!"

What do you do?

The term ends next week, and you have a big homework assignment due in Geography. It includes about three hours of textbook work and coloring maps, and it's worth enough points to raise or drop your final grade. You need an A in the class to stay in the running for a scholarship, and right now, you have a B+. Because of an unexpected family emergency, you had to leave town last weekend. You didn't get the assignment finished, and it seems unlikely you'll be able to raise your grade if you turn it in incomplete. The Geography teacher has already said no late work and no excuses will be accepted.

At lunch, your best friend sits next to you. After hearing your story, they say, "Here! Just copy the last part of mine so you can get full credit. It's not your fault you had to go out of town, and people share homework all the time."

What do you do?

The term ends next week, and you have a big homework assignment due in Geography. It includes about three hours of textbook work and coloring maps, and it's worth enough points to raise or drop your final grade. You need an A in the class to stay in the running for a scholarship, and right now, you have a B+. You procrastinated until the last minute and didn't finish the assignment. It seems unlikely you'll be able to raise your grade if you turn it in incomplete, and the Geography teacher has already said no late work and no excuses will be accepted.

At lunch, you find out your best friend did the same thing. They suggest that the two of you work together for the rest of lunch to get it done. "We'll each do half of what's left and then copy each other's answers," they say. "The teacher will never know. We're just sharing the work."

What do you do?



APPENDIX (CONTINUED):

The term ends next week, and you have a big homework assignment due in Geography. It involves three hours of textbook questions and coloring maps, and it doesn't really measure how well you understand the concepts—even though it's worth enough points to raise or drop your final grade. You need an A in the class to stay in the running for a scholarship, and right now, you have a B+.

You misjudged how long the assignment would take and didn't finish it, but you're sure you could pass a final exam if you had to. At your lunch table that day, you discover that someone left their completed assignment behind. If you hurry, you'll have just enough time to copy the remaining answers, which would get you the A that you feel you've earned.

You know some people might say that's cheating—but you honestly can't see how anyone would be hurt by it. Besides, you're pretty sure you could ace a final exam instead of doing what feels like busywork.

What do you do?

The term ends next week, and you have a big homework assignment due in Geography. The teacher is known for being strict and has already said that no late work will be accepted. This is the same teacher who plays favorites and once yelled at one of your friends so harshly that it made them cry. Most students agree that this is not a great teacher, and even your parents have told you that you can switch to a different Geography class when the semester ends.

The homework involves three hours of textbook questions and coloring maps. It's worth enough points to raise or drop your final grade. You need to keep your A in the class to stay in the running for a scholarship—but you completely forgot about the assignment.

Suddenly, you remember it when you see someone else's completed assignment left on the table. There's no name on it. If you leave it there, no one gets anything out of all that hard work. But if you turn it in as your own, you'll keep your A—and feel like you finally got the best of that teacher.

What do you do?

The term ends next week, and you have a big homework assignment due in Geography. It involves about three hours of textbook work and coloring maps, and it's worth enough points to raise or drop your final grade. You need an A in the class to stay in the running for a scholarship, and right now, you have a B+.

You spent extra time and effort on the assignment to make sure it's your best work, and you expect it to raise your grade to an A. At lunch, your best friend tells you that they had to leave town last weekend because of an unexpected family emergency. They didn't finish the assignment, and now they won't be able to stay in the scholarship race—unless you let them copy your answers and turn it in on time.

What do you do?