ETHICS

Life is full of little choices. There is an old saying: "What is popular is not always right; what is right is not always popular." We don't always make the right choices or do the right thing. Mistakes are a normal part of living and to be expected. All people make mistakes; it's part of living. When we make a mistake, we gain more self-awareness and, hopefully, learn a life's lesson. It's true! We can learn by our mistakes. What is more important, we can avoid some mistakes if we take the time to identify our personal values and ethics.

WHAT ARE VALUES AND ETHICS anyway? They are not fancy words to be thought of carelessly, or worse, not thought of at all!

VALUES are attitudes and beliefs about things we think are important in life.

Family time, money, fame, religion, education, health, community service, independence, honesty are all values. There are other values, of course, depending on the individual.

If becoming famous is not important to you then fame is not a personal value for you. Obviously, then, values differ with the person. We don't always agree with others about the importance, or value, of some things in life. Family life is extremely important to some people; there are others who would rather be on their own and allow for very little family time.

ETHICS are the rules of personal behavior accepted by society.

Ethics are also known as a "code of conduct." Our personal values contribute to the strength of our ethics with positive behaviors and positive attitudes.

Our values, and consequently our ethics, are in a continuous development or building cycle. We are confronted with choices every day. Most often we all make good choices. Sometimes we may falter. Sometimes we make a wrong decision or a wrong

choice. Learning to make choices begins at birth and is a growing process. We begin practicing making choices—very simple at first.   As we grow and get older, our choices become more important and become our patterns of behavior. Our choices begin to shape our attitudes, our self-image, our lifestyle, and how we are perceived by others.

Personal values and ethics can, at times, be in conflict. For example: If a person's strongest personal value is to be rich, this value's influence on his behavior and decision making could be in conflict with society's rules of behavior. An individual wanting to be rich, may believe it's okay to cheat people or lie to get what he wants. An ethical person is honest, diligent, respectful, trustworthy, and responsible. An honest person does not lie, cheat or steal, or try to achieve personal gain at the expense of others. It is never acceptable to break society's code of conduct, or ethical standards, to achieve a personal value!

Any individual who breaks society's code of conduct, even if he doesn't get caught, loses integrity and self-respect. Cheating on school or work assigned tasks may lesson personal stress for the present but will eventually return to haunt you. Just as positive behaviors and attitudes become a way of life so do negative behaviors and attitudes. Don't fall into the trap of excusing away a breakdown of your ethical standards.

An ethical person is a good citizen at home, at school or work, and in the community. The community is an individual's neighborhood, town/city, school or workplace, state, nation, and the world. An ethical person is caring. He cares about people, the environment, our planet and his behavior supports society and our world.

Personal ethics, school ethics, social ethics, computer ethics, workplace ethics are basically the same. Ethics are about the individual. Specialized groups or organizations generally follow the ethics of their leaders. Groups and organizations are made up of individuals. Each person in an organization must be ethical.   If a student at school or an employee in the workplace believes someone around him is participating in unethical practices or promoting deceptive information, it is his responsibility to speak up. It takes courage to defend the rules of society. Courage means doing the right thing, even when it is scary.

Students at school and employees in the workplace who are ethical have good reputations. They are respected, well-liked, admired, and trustworthy. They contribute to society by doing what is right. Right is right, and wrong is wrong. There are no gray areas. Doing what is right will always make you a stronger person and, most often, make your school or workplace a better place.
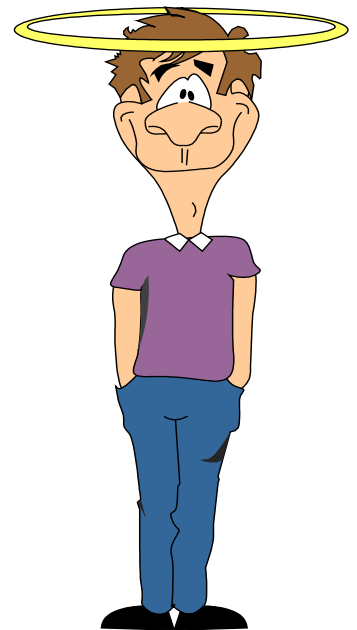
An individual can make a difference. An ethical person chooses to be a positive

example for others to follow. An ethical person chooses to think positively, speak positively, behave positively. Another old saying: people may not believe what you say but they will always believe what you do!

Teachers and employers expect you to follow the rules. It's important! Rules help insure equal treatment for everyone.   Teachers and employers expect you to be on time and to do your work individually. And, when you are a member of a team, they expect you to do your share of the work. An ethical person does not sit back and allow others to do his work. An ethical person carries his load—his share of the work.

Teachers and employers also expect you to treat others with kindness and respect. At school and in the workplace, you interact with lots of people. Obviously, you will like some better than others. You may even dislike some people. Disliking someone is not an excuse for not doing your work. You don't have to like someone to work with them. Learning to get along with everyone is a crucial skill you must learn for personal success in school and in the workplace. Life does not allow us to pick and choose all the people in our life. It's very, very important to you personally to try to get along with everyone.

Computers have become a major part of our lives. We all use them; we all need them in today's world. Computer use is commonplace at home, at school, at work. In fact, computer use is woven into all aspects of society today. Our attitudes about and behaviors on the computer have become a worldwide concern. Schools, workplaces, cities, states, national and world governments are concerned about individual computer ethics. In the workplace, and in schools, **computer use is being monitored**. In other words, computers are being used by teachers, administrators, employers, and governments to watch what an individual is doing at his computer. Software programs have been developed that allow authorities to watch what we do at our computers. These programs monitor information typed into a computer, e-mails received and sent, Internet use and web sites visited.   **It is perfectly legal for a school or employer to watch what you are doing at the computer**. The computer belongs to the school or business and therefore they want to ensure it is used legally, appropriately, and more importantly focused on assigned and work-related tasks.

Have you heard the term, *hacking?* Some computer-lovers enjoy the challenge of trying to get into computer systems they are not authorized to enter.
Computer hackers are breaking the law—it is a crime!

Hackers try to break into the security systems of educational institutions, corporations, and government sites.

Another common computer term you may have heard is ***piracy.*** It also is a crime.

Piracy is when someone copies a computer program (even for personal use) without permission.

Generally, buyers of software programs are allowed to make one, and only one copy, legally. This one copy then serves as a backup and may only be used as such. It cannot be shared with others.

Read through the Ten Commandments of Computer Ethics on the next page. Use these commandments as your behavior guide when you work at the computer. Both hacking and piracy (#1-3, #6) are referred to in the commandments. Theft of intellectual output and resources means to use another person's ideas and present them as your own. It's called **plagiarism.**

The ethics you practice now at home, in school, in the community will carry over into your adult life. Act now to make the right decision, to do the right thing, to be a positive person. Make these things a "normal" part of your life. Decide now to set high ethics and positive behaviors for yourself. Decide now what is and is not acceptable to you for success.

As the Army recruiter says:

"BE THE BEST YOU CAN BE!"