



#604 ETHICS: CHEATING AND PLAGIARISM

Is copying homework from a friend considered cheating? What about getting material from the Internet? The issue of cheating in schools is more prevalent and relevant than ever in today's culture; polls show that 80% of high school students admit to having cheated. In this program, teens speak out frankly about why they feel the need to cheat, while raising questions about 'what counts' as well as the definition of cheating.

We also meet ninth graders from a New Jersey high school who are required to participate in a series of ethics courses. In a cheating and plagiarism workshop, we see them wrestle with typical situations and develop recommendations for the school ethics handbook. The students also discuss the long-term effects of cheating and ways that it might be prevented. This program is designed to open classroom discussion and critical thinking about ethical behavior among student in grades 6-12.

DID YOU KNOW?

- **57%** of high school students say they didn't think copying a few sentences without proper credit, sharing test answers, or getting answers from someone who had taken the test was cheating (Rutgers University Study, 2001)
 - **53%** of high school students say that cheating is "no big deal"*
 - **98%** say they have let others copy their work*
 - **34%** said their parents never talked to them about cheating*
- *(Josephson's Institute of Ethics, 2000)

HOW TO USE THIS PROGRAM

Independent research on previous In the Mix specials have shown that these programs engage the interest of teenagers, deliver information, catalyze discussion on critical issues, as well as promote analytical thinking and a greater sense of empowerment among teens. The aim is to encourage thought and allow teens to generate their own creative solutions.

In this guide, we have outlined specific questions based on the programs' content, along with answers. These questions can be used to open up more analytical discussion about related concepts. Also included are in-class activities and longer-term projects. We suggest showing the entire program to the group and then running individual segments followed by discussion.

SECTION 1: WHY STUDENTS CHEAT

Students talk about their attitudes on cheating, why cheating happens, how much they cheat or know other students who cheat, and the effect it has on their peers and their own education.

1. What are some of the reasons the students give as to why they, or other students, cheat?

Students cheat because there are other students who cheat and get away with it; competition and the pressure to get good grades and get into good schools; teacher apathy; pressure from parents to get good grades; laziness; don't understand the material; tests or quizzes are too hard and given unfairly

2. How do the students feel about cheating? Copying homework? Copying information off the Internet?

It's okay if you don't do it often; acceptable since the assignment may be pointless; easy to do, though they may not actually be learning anything

FURTHER DISCUSSION:

Discuss some other reasons why students might cheat. What kind of material seems 'pointless' and not so important to know? What do you think your reactions would be if you knew that some students in a class were cheating and earning better grades than you? Is the Internet a resource that encourages cheating, or is it a source, "just like anything else," which can be abused but also used for a good purpose? What can teachers do to help prevent cheating in their classrooms?

RELATED ACTIVITY:

Take a secret poll. In the poll, each student is to mark a YES or NO if he or she knows at least one person who has cheated on a test, then whether the student him or herself has cheated on a test. Does the student know anyone who copied part or all of an essay for a writing assignment (from another person or the Internet)? Has the student done this him or herself?

Next, does the student know of at least one time when a teacher knew someone was cheating in a class and did nothing about it? Does the student know at least one time when a teacher did not supervise a test and at least one other student cheated? Collect and tabulate the results. Make a chart (pie chart or graph) displaying the results. Discuss the results to see what it may say about cheating or the school's prevention of cheating.

SECTION 2: THE ETHICS PROJECT

Freshmen at the Bergen Academies in Hackensack, New Jersey take a course on ethics, which addresses cheating and plagiarism. In this class, they review their school's plagiarism policy and review case studies to see whether the policy is clear and applicable. The students then review the punishments for violating the plagiarism policy.

Case Studies

1. Taking ideas from an Internet source and rewriting them without crediting the original source
2. Copying homework problems
3. Copying lines of text from the Internet
4. Telling other students what information is covered on a quiz or test

1. Who helped developed the school's plagiarism policy?

Parents, students, faculty and administration

2. What cases did the students consider actions of cheating or plagiarism? How severe was each case?

Case 1: Taking ideas from an Internet source and rewriting them without crediting the original source (moderately severe, student was misguided by the definition of plagiarism therefore the policy should be clarified)

Case 2: Copying homework (mildly severe, punishment should be based on the severity of the case; homework isn't as severe as copying an entire essay)

Case 3: Copying text from the Internet (direct violation)

3. What did they think was not cheating or plagiarism? Why wasn't this case considered a violation?

Case 4: Telling other students what information is covered on a quiz or test (the student didn't know the answers to the test, he still had to put forth an effort and study the information)

FURTHER DISCUSSION:

Review the same case studies and discuss whether or not you agree with the students' findings. The students in the program seemed to differentiate levels of severity in the case studies. Do you also think that some cases were 'more severe' than others? Were there cases where you disagree completely and don't think that the particular case was a case of plagiarism? What about the 4th case study—is telling others the content of a quiz or test cheating?

RELATED ACITIVTY:

Create a poll using the case studies provided in the program, or create new case studies that challenge the plagiarism policy at your school. Then take the poll around school and ask students their opinion on the cases involved. What kinds of activities do most students consider cheating? Another item of the poll can be asking students if they know the punishment involved for cheating at their school. Are parents informed? Are suspensions involved?

4. What elements are involved in the punishments for violating the plagiarism policy?
Loss of grade, involvement of parents, community service, suspension, Saturday school, alternative placement in another school.

FURTHER DISCUSSION:

First, discuss the plagiarism policy at your own school. How many people know it? What punishments are involved for violating the policy? Get a copy of the policy. How well known is it among students? Does it make sense? Can it be applied to the case studies in the program? How much do you think students should be involved in creating and implementing your school's plagiarism policy? Are students involved already? Is there a way for students to address problems with the cheating policy to your school's administration?

SECTION 3: HOW CAN YOU PREVENT CHEATING?

Students discuss ways they can help prevent cheating in their own schools

1. What do the students recommend to help prevent cheating in their schools?
Teachers be more familiar with their students; students be properly placed in classes that they handle; teachers have the freedom to create assignments particular to their own classes; parental involvement; more remedial help available

FURTHER DISCUSSION:

List the students' suggested methods and discuss the effects each one would have to prevent cheating. What effect would a closer teacher-student relationship have? Or parental involvement? Why do you think a lot of these methods are more preventative than methods of dealing with cheating after it has already happened? What do you personally feel needs to be done in the classroom to make you feel less pressure to cheat?

RELATED ACTIVITY:

Compose a letter to your school's principal or newspaper discussing the cheating policy. Do not make accusations, but instead write about how familiar you are with the policy, and whether it is up to date, especially in regards to the Internet. Are there clear reasons to revise or update the policy? What suggestions can you make to help other students be informed of the policy?

2. What personal strategies do the students discuss to help prevent cheating?
Don't offer answers to other students; encourage other students to go for extra help or tutoring

THE KEY CONCEPTS:

1. Identifying cheating
 - Define cheating and identify the various reasons why students cheat. Examine the effect cheating has on a student's education—both for the student who cheats and the student who doesn't cheat but knows others that do.
2. Clarifying school policy.
 - Review the school policy on plagiarism and check to see if it is applicable and clear. Can case studies be applied to it? Are the penalties clear and uniform?
3. Prevention
 - There are several methods of preventing cheating—teacher-student relationship, parental involvement, students working on a level that is realistic, available support. Utilization of all these methods will help students be more comfortable with doing their own work rather than depending on others.

RESOURCES

Bergen County Academies

Hackensack, NJ

(201) 343-6000

www.bergen.org/ACADEMY

The Character Education Partnership

Washington, DC

(800) 988-8081

<http://www.character.org/>

HOW TO REACH IN THE MIX

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