WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- Should we pursue research on stem cells?
- Is same-sex marriage a civil right?
- Should we allow testing on animals?
- Should parents read their children’s email?
- Does the death penalty bring about justice?

ETHICS ARE a set of moral principles, especially ones relating to or affirming a specified group form of conduct. For example, there are Christian ethics, moral ethics, etc.

WHY STUDY ETHICS?

There are several reasons to study ethics, but mostly because we all use ethics on a daily basis whether we realize it or not. What is or is not ethical behavior?

Studying ethics is one way of finding out who we are. This question might have confused earlier generations, but today we live in a different times; times when ethical behavior appears to be called into question within our culture. Studying ethics is appropriate, valuable and useful because it asks us to consider our responses to everyday and extraordinary circumstances, then question if change is necessary – maybe, maybe not.

While studying ethics, we have an opportunity to reflect on matters of pressing importance, to anticipate and respond to moral dilemmas, and to think deeply about what kind of life we want (or perhaps are commanded) to lead.

The following situation ethics examples can be discussed within small groups or make up your own! These are appropriate for senior high age youth and older.

TRUCK REPAIR

On the way in to school, you notice a brand new truck parked on the street that has a long, deep scratch on the side. You’re pretty sure it belongs to someone you have in first hour, so you ask them what happened when you get to class.

Unfortunately, it’s his parent’s truck but he doesn’t know what you’re talking about…so it must have happened after he parked the car this morning. You feel really sorry for him because there was no note left on the windshield. The scratch is really noticeable, will be expensive to repair and he said he’d have to pay for it out of his own pocket.

Later that day, you leave for lunch with a good friend, and notice their passenger side mirror is all scratched and bent out of shape. When you ask them what happened, they “confess” they got a little too close to a truck that morning on the way to school and might have scraped it - just a little. You ask if they left a note and they tell you they didn’t think of that but they’ll tell the owner later.

The next day you find out that the guy in first hour will have to pay $585 to have the scratch repaired. And, he still doesn’t know who did it.
MOVIE
You went over to a very good friend’s house to watch movies. During the movie, they ask you if you want to smoke pot. You didn’t know they even smoked pot – or knew how to get it. How do you feel and what do you do?

TEST SCORES
You just got back a test score. The teacher over-scored you….she didn’t count the questions you’d missed on the back of the test. You got an A instead of the B you really earned. You studied really hard for this test, and it’s the difference between an A and B on your final grade. What do you do?

TESTING
You’ve seen people cheat on tests before…but you just figured, what the heck, that’s their business. But, this time, the person sitting next to you – who by the way is really popular – tells you right before class starts that they want you to “help” them with the answers.

The teacher walks out of the room.

You study hard and it’s always irritated you when people cheat on a test. What do you do? What do you say?

CHECK-OUT ERROR
You went to the store and bought several things; a skirt, two pairs of shoes, and nail polish. When the cashier rings up your items you notice she left off one pair of shoes. You call this to her attention, but she says “It’s on there, I rang it up”. You’re sure she didn’t.

You get out of the store and the receipt shows only one pair of shoes. What do you do?

OOPS!
You’re running errands for your mom. She asks you to pick up at least twenty things from the store. You get everything in the basket and check out.

When you get out to the car you notice a jar of peanut butter sitting by your purse. You obviously missed it, and didn’t pay for it. What do you do?

Bears in the Forest
A family lives in a house by a forest. The parents don’t want their young children to go out into the woods alone. They tell the children that there are bears in the woods, even though the parents know there are no bears there. Was it ethical for the parents to lie?
MEDICAL ETHICS

A patient tells his doctor that he has gotten engaged. The doctor knows that the patient has a serious communicable disease, and asks the patient whether or not he has told his fiancée. The patient says that he has not, and will not. What should the doctor do?

Who Lives? Who Dies?
A German family is hiding their Jewish neighbors from the Nazis. The Jewish family is well-hidden behind a false wall, but they also have a newborn infant. The Nazis are downstairs in the basement looking for the Jews when the baby begins to cry. The baby’s cries will certainly give them away, and there is (in this hypothetical situation) no way to stop the baby from crying without killing it. There are possible scenarios, each with their own ethical problems:

a. The mother of the infant smothers her child.
b. The German family demands that the mother smother her child.
c. The German family smothers the child themselves.
d. The two families decide to do nothing, resulting in the Jewish family’s death and the German family’s imprisonment and possible death
e. The two families decide to do nothing, resulting in the deaths of all members of both families

ADDITIONAL SHORT QUESTIONS:

- If the government has fixed the highway speed at 55 miles per hour, is it wrong (immoral, unethical) to drive at 60 mph on the highway?

- Your best friend knows your parents are away for the weekend and wants to use your place to sleep with his girlfriend. What do you tell him?

- You’re running for student council. Your opponent is very popular and ahead in the race. You discover your opponent is a cocaine user. Do you “leak” the information, knowing it might help you win?

- A casual friend invites you to her party. You accept and promise you’ll be there. Later that day, a popular person you’ve wanted to get together with invites you to his party. Which party do you attend?

- You’re stopped by a person on the street who asks for a couple of dollars to buy lunch. You give him the money, but as you walk away, you spy him entering a liquor store. Do you go back and confront the person? Does this influence how you’ll respond in the future?

- Your parents own a personal computer, but it didn’t come with video games. You love playing the video games at your friend’s house, and you wish you had some of your own. Your friend offers to copy a few of his games for you. He says everyone does it; even the video companies know their games are copied. Do you accept the games?

- You get a test back and see your grade—an A! You notice, though, that the teacher made an error in grading and mistakenly gave you a few extra points. You actually
deserved a B+. It doesn’t seem like a big deal—and it was the teacher’s mistake, not yours. Should you tell the teacher about his error?

- At the end of a long day at work, the manager compliments you on a job well done and gives you a twenty-dollar bill from the cash register. She tells you it’s a bonus. You happily take the money! But over the weekend you start to wonder if the manager should have taken the money directly from the cash register. Was she stealing? You feel slightly guilty about taking the money, but you’re also pretty sure you did nothing wrong. Should you contact the owner of the store about what happened?

- You’re in math class and you see a friend of yours cheat on a test. No one else sees it. You don’t want to get your friend in trouble. Should you turn your friend in? Would you mention it to them?

- After going through the drive-through, you notice that the clerk gave you back two extra dollars in change. If she would’ve given you an extra twenty bucks, you’d definitely go back and clear up the mistake. But the drive-through line and the lines inside the restaurant are all pretty long at this point and it was only two bucks. Should you get back in line to return the extra money?

- You’re a parent of two young children and one of them was just diagnosed with terminal cancer. A recent scientific breakthrough has discovered that a cure for cancer can be developed from healthy cells. The cells must be taken from young children, under the age of three. Your healthy child is two years old and you’re considering doing the procedure. The surgery has a relatively painless recovery, but it is rather risky and has a 2% mortality rate. Would you choose to do the surgery on the healthy child for the sake of saving the sick child?

- You’ve just given birth to twins and have learned that they are conjoined. Doctors tell you they’ll be able to live a healthy life until their twenties or thirties, but will likely die as young adults. They will also be unable to do many of the normal activities children do and will probably have very few friends because of their abnormality. Doctors have perfected a surgery to separate this type of conjoined twins. The surgery will end the life of one of the twins while the other will live and likely grow to live a healthy and full life. Would you choose to separate the twins or leave them conjoined?