How you make decisions every day determines your character, and the course of your life. This booklet is designed as a roadmap to making decisions that will ensure your long-term happiness. You’ll read about problems that teenagers like you have faced, and learn to solve them with the guide of universal values promoted by the nonprofit CHARACTER COUNTS! We hope these concepts help you through this difficult, exciting, and very important part of your life.
Making Ethical Decisions

A Guide To Long-Term Happiness For Teens
Making Ethical Decisions
A Guide To Long-Term Happiness
For Teens

by Josephson Institute
Home of CHARACTER COUNTS!


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The mission of the nonprofit, nonpartisan
JOSEPHSON INSTITUTE is to improve the
ethical quality of society by changing personal
and organizational decision making and behavior.
Nationally active and based in southern California, the
Institute uses presentations, consulting, community
trainings, workshops and publications to help focus the
energy of people who want to do something to make
our society more honest, fair, caring and accountable.
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Introduction

Though he’s usually a pretty happy guy, Sam is stressed out. He’s been struggling in Algebra II, and he’s running out of chances to bring up his grade. His parents put a lot of pressure on him to do well so he can get into a decent college, and he’s starting to feel like a rat trapped in a corner, about to be smacked by a broom. The broom, in this case, is a test he has in a few days. He’s studying really hard for it, but he just can’t seem to understand quadratic equations. Sam’s friend Jason has the same problem, but Jason’s not worried. He says their teacher never looks up during tests, so it’s easy to cheat off the brainiac next to him.

Sam has a couple of smart kids sitting near him too, but he doesn’t like the idea of cheating. He thinks cheating is wrong. Still though, he’s terrified of not getting into college. What choices does he have? What would you do?

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Everything you do and say involves choices between competing values. Sometimes the stakes are high, like getting accepted to college, and sometimes more trivial, like saving money by illegally downloading music. How you make both the big and little decisions determines the course of your life and the content of your character.

The purpose of this book is to help teenagers make decisions that will increase their long-term happiness. The pressure Sam feels to succeed at all costs is just one outside influence that
can drive him to make a poor decision that leads to unhappy consequences. Other influences might include the pressure to fit in, the pressure to be considered attractive, and the pressure to be seen as having a lot of money.

Our guidelines for good decision making are based on universal values agreed upon by thousands of leaders and organizations across the U.S. and around the world. These values are called the Six Pillars of Character. The Six Pillars are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. Using the Six Pillars of Character and common examples, we will walk you through a step-by-step process for making tough choices in the years ahead. Making good decisions might not guarantee you happiness, but happiness is impossible for those who routinely make bad decisions.

The first step in making a good decision is to take into account the interests and well-being of everyone likely to be affected by your actions. These people (and possibly animals) are called “stakeholders” because they have a stake in your decision. For example, a mother has a stake in her daughter’s decision to come home before her curfew. If the daughter doesn’t come home on time, her mother worries and can’t sleep until she knows her daughter is safe. We’ll talk more about stakeholders later in the book.

The next step is to remember what your values are. Whether you’re conscious of it or not, the choices you make tell the world what you value. For a person of good character, the core values of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship take precedence over all others. What decision can you make that maintains your integrity in these areas? Going back to the curfew example, if the daughter stays out all night, she violates five out of the Six Pillars: breaking her mother’s trust, showing disrespect for her rules, behaving irresponsibly and unfairly toward her, and not caring about her feelings.

What if you have to violate one ethical value to uphold another? In that case, do what will produce the greatest amount of good in the long run. Let’s say the daughter has to stay out past curfew because her friend’s car broke down, and she’s asked her to wait with her until the tow truck arrives. That’s the trustworthy, caring thing to do, but so is calling her mother and explaining to her why she’ll be late.
One strategy to use when you’re faced with a confusing decision is to think backward from the result you’d like. Generally, a poor decision ends in a bad result because the decision is illegal, unethical, or ineffective. A good decision legally, ethically, and effectively accomplishes the primary purpose. A better decision accomplishes the purpose without causing any unintended consequences. And the best decision, the one that achieves the best possible result, solves the immediate problem, avoids negative unintended consequences, provides a broader solution for avoiding future problems, and enhances the decision maker’s credibility.

So going back to Sam’s dilemma on page 1, what’s the result Sam wants? To pass the test. Let’s say he thinks the surest way to accomplish this is by cheating. What risks is he taking? What does this decision say about Sam’s values? About his character?

What can Sam do that might achieve the best possible result, which is that Sam passes the test without cheating? If he has a few days before he has to take it, he still has time to ask the teacher or a classmate for help, or find a tutor. If he puts all his effort into learning the material, he might pass. And even if Sam fails the exam, isn’t it better that he fail the test but maintain his integrity? Failing the test might result in his failing the class and having to take it again. That’s not the happiest outcome, but it’s better than getting caught cheating. That could result in expulsion from school and the destruction of his reputation.

Of course, you can’t become a good person simply by reading a book. Real-life stresses will always be there to tempt you to rationalize and take the easy way out. But if you learn the values and steps in this booklet, you will have some excellent tools to increase your happiness and the happiness of the people around you.
I. Making Sense Of Ethics

What Is Ethics?

If your best friend is taking dangerous drugs and engaging in other risky behaviors, should you tell his parents? Should you lie about your age to save money on a movie ticket? Should you stick up for a stranger if your best friend is making fun of him? In any difficult situation, ethics are the set of principles or rules that help us make our decisions about right and wrong. These principles don’t always give us a single “right answer,” but they offer a way to evaluate and decide among competing options.

Our ethical principles are based on our values, the non-material things we prize in life. Values are ideas or beliefs we consider desirable or worthwhile. Some values don’t have anything to do with ethics. We value literature and music, but we don’t use them to decide between right and wrong. Ethical values, on the other hand, help us form our ethical principles. If you value honesty, for example, you create a rule in the form of “do and don’t” based on honesty. “Do tell the truth; don’t lie.”

The Importance of Universal Values

People receive their beliefs about right and wrong from their religion, culture, family history, personal experience, or the law. The trouble with these sources for ethical values is that they aren’t universal. People from different countries or religions or generations don’t always value the same things. Parsa’s religion may value sexual abstinence, for example, and her boyfriend Tyler may not belong to a religion. So how do they talk to each other about right and wrong behavior?

If we base our ethics on universal values, we know that they were arrived at by consensus, an agreement by a majority of people in our society. The universal values of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship provide a common language and framework that works for almost everyone.

When Values Clash

The toughest decisions are those that involve a tug-of-war between two high priority values. Tim is excited that he made the
JV football team, but he finds out that new members traditionally compete in a tequila-drinking contest for “initiation.” A boy at a neighboring high school suffered brain damage last year from a contest like that. Tim’s desire to fit in on the team is in direct conflict with his desire for his own safety. When our values clash, we have to rank them in order of importance to us. The ones we consistently rank highest in our value system are our operational values (doing what we say we believe, or “walking the talk”), and these define our character.

**Why Be Ethical?**

It’s not easy to be ethical, to consistently do the right thing, so why bother? Different people have different reasons: some do it to gain respect from their peers, or to increase their own self-esteem. Others believe their good behavior pleases God or brings them rewards like success in school or work. These are all valid reasons.

But the best reason we can think of is happiness. The Founding Fathers of the U.S.A. thought the “pursuit of happiness” was so important they included it as one of the three basic rights of free people. As free people we can pursue the values we think will make us happy. We can go after money, sex, and drunken fun, but every celebrity gossip story that makes the rounds on the Internet shows us that those things don’t bring real happiness. There’s a deeper fulfillment that comes from living by universal ethical values. If we guide our behavior using these true, proven values, we will lay the foundation for real happiness.
II. The Six Pillars of Character

Trustworthiness. Respect. Responsibility. Fairness. Caring. Citizenship. The Six Pillars of Character are ethical values to guide our choices. The rules of conduct that are formed from those values are the ground rules of ethics, and therefore of ethical decision making.

There is nothing magical about the number six, but most universal values fall under these six headings. Six is a manageable number, and the Six Pillars of Character provide us with a common terminology. We need a common terminology so that, in our diverse and divided society, we are all speaking the same ethical language. We can communicate better with each other and gain greater understanding of ethical decision making.

When we make decisions, we need to measure our options against all Six Pillar values. It’s not enough just to meet the “trustworthy” test. Our choice must also be consistent with respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. If we consciously consider all six, we won’t focus so hard on upholding one moral principle that we sacrifice another one.

Let’s take the Pillar values one at a time to see how this works.

1. TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness is the broadest and most complicated of the six core ethical values. It includes a variety of other values, such as honesty, integrity, reliability, and loyalty.

Honesty

We know someone is trustworthy when they prove to us time after time that they are honest. You may not realize it, but honesty involves both our words and our actions. Here’s a situation where all of the dimensions of honesty are tested, and violated:

Ben hatches a plan with his classmates to cheat on their Spanish exam. He steals the teacher’s answer copy, and then texts the answers to his friends while they are all taking the test. When the teacher sees a few students texting, she demands that anyone who is cheating stand up. Two or three students stand
up, but Ben doesn’t. Instead he blurts out, “Not me!” and puts on an expression of shock and disgust at those who are caught.

Ben is obviously the worst culprit here. First he violates the rules of *honesty in conduct* by stealing the test and cheating. Cheating is an especially nasty kind of dishonesty because the cheater not only tries to deceive, but he may lower the grades of the students who aren’t cheating. Then he violates all three kinds of *honesty in communication*:

- **Truthfulness** means presenting the facts to the best of our knowledge. Ben lies and says, “Not me!”
- **Sincerity**, or genuineness, means no half-truths, misleading statements, or even silence that gives the wrong impression. Ben’s shocked expression is insincere, right?
- **Candor**, or forthrightness, requires us to volunteer information another person should know. Ben should volunteer that he was the one who stole the answers. Otherwise the other students may be punished for his wrongdoing.

Sometimes it’s excusable to tell a “white lie” to spare someone’s feelings: “Your violin playing was beautiful!” you tell your friend after her recital, even if it sounded more like a fork on a chalkboard. There are also some very rare occasions when it’s not unethical at all to lie. These are usually life and death situations, as when police lie in undercover operations or when someone lies to criminals or terrorists to save lives. If you have a younger brother or sister, you may lie about the existence of Santa Claus or the Tooth Fairy in order to preserve their innocence. But don’t kid yourself: occasions for ethically approved lying require a very high purpose. Calling in sick to your after-school job so that you can go to the beach doesn’t meet that standard.

**Integrity**

The word *integrity* comes from the same Latin root as “integer,” which, as you learned in math, means “whole number.” Like whole numbers, people of integrity are undivided and complete. This means that *what they say they believe* matches
up with what they actually believe. We can trust people of integrity because they consistently make decisions that follow from their core values, whether or not it’s easy, and whether or not anyone will find out.

Gaby and Luz are best friends. Every day they post messages on each other’s Facebook pages and sign off “Your BFF!! XOXOXO!!” One day Gaby hears a rumor that Luz went out with the boyfriend of one of the popular girls. She suspects it may be true, but she hasn’t talked to Luz about it yet. All the popular girls want to know if the rumor is true, and Gaby is getting a lot of attention from them. She likes the attention, and is tempted to reveal that she knows Luz has a crush on the boy. Is that what a best friend with integrity does?

No, that is what a hypocrite does. If Gaby says she values Luz’s friendship but then gossips about her behind her back, she’s “two-faced.” If she has the moral courage and integrity to resist that temptation, she’s trustworthy.

Reliability (Promise Keeping)

People who reliably keep their promises are trustworthy. If we want to be reliable, we have to be very careful to make promises we think we can keep, then do everything we can to keep those promises.

Sharon asks if she can borrow some money from her friend Rachel. Rachel says OK, but she wants the money back in two weeks. Sharon knows she can’t earn enough from her after-school job to pay Rachel back that quickly. She tells her, “If I can have three weeks to pay you back, I promise you’ll get it all then.”

Sharon is doing the smart and reliable thing. She’s avoiding unwise commitments by considering realistically how long it will take her to keep her promise. She’s avoiding unclear commitments by stating exactly when and how much she will repay. Sharon will be able to avoid bad-faith excuses because she has made a promise she can keep and she intends to work hard to repay the debt. If something unforeseen happens, if she gets sick and can’t go to work, at least she will have done her best to be reliable. At that time, she can explain the situation to her friend and ask for an extension of the commitment.
Loyalty

Some relationships create an expectation of loyalty. Loyalty is a responsibility to support certain people or organizations beyond the normal obligation we all share to care for others. For teens, being trustworthy means being loyal to family, friends, and community. That said, there are some exceptions.

Limits of Loyalty. No one has the right to ask us to do something wrong out of loyalty.

James can’t afford the expensive basketball shoes that all the other guys on the varsity team are wearing. He asks his friend Darren to steal him a pair from the store where he works. Darren is a loyal friend, but he knows that stealing is too high a price to pay for their friendship. You don’t owe loyalty to anyone who asks you to do something unethical.

Prioritizing loyalties. We all owe loyalty to many people, and at times they compete for our attention. Sometimes it’s necessary to rank some loyalties higher than others, and to put those first.

Paul is looking forward to driving off campus with his friends for lunch, a new privilege that comes with being a senior. But he sees his younger sister Sasha eating alone in the schoolyard, and he can tell by her tear-streaked face that something is wrong. Despite his friends’ pleading, Paul stays and eats lunch with Sasha. Paul puts his sister first, over his friends, and even over his own fun.

Safeguarding confidential information. When we’re loyal to our friends, we keep their private information private. But if
keeping a secret could hurt someone or break the law, we have a responsibility to blow the whistle.

Spencer and Adam grew up next door to each other and were always close friends. Spencer has started pulling away lately because Adam has become increasingly distant and he’s hanging out with a new group of creepy guys. Spencer continues to follow Adam’s blog, and what he sees has him really worried. Adam and the new friends have been talking for days about how much they hate the jocks and plan to “get even.” One boy posts that his father’s gun is in the trunk of his car, and they can use it. While they are waiting for the bus one morning, Adam warns Spencer that he should stay home the next day, because it might get “dicey” at school. Spencer is afraid he is jumping to conclusions and doesn’t want to get Adam into trouble.

Spencer has to tell his parents immediately. Whether or not he’s jumping to conclusions or being disloyal to Adam, he has information that Adam’s friends are talking about taking a gun to school. Keeping this secret could have fatal consequences. It’s up to Spencer to tell the adults, and it’s up to the adults to find out what’s really going on and protect innocent people from getting hurt. Spencer’s loyalty must be to everyone at school who could be harmed.

2. RESPECT

Everyone has a right to be treated with respect, our second Pillar value. We don’t have to like or admire everyone, but if we want to be happy, we have show respect to everyone – even rude or annoying people. This makes you happier because respect comes back to you: the more you give to others, the more you will receive in return.
For example, Ben, the student who steals the Spanish exam on page 7, texts the answers to his friends, and then refuses to confess to the cheating. He shows no respect for anyone, and that comes back to haunt him. All of his fellow cheaters turn him in, and the teacher feels so disrespected that she recommends to the principal that he be suspended from school and made to repeat Spanish II the following year.

The Golden Rule — “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” — sums up the requirements of respect. Respect prohibits violence, humiliation, bullying, and exploitation, all things you wouldn’t want done to you. It requires us to practice *courtesy, decency, tolerance, and acceptance.*

**The Golden Rule**

The Golden Rule is the most basic and useful ethical principle. It goes back thousands of years and has been a guide for cultures all over the world.

- **Confucius** (500 B.C.): “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.”
- **Aristotle** (325 B.C.): “We should behave to others as we wish them to behave to us.”
- **Judaism** (The Talmud): “What is hateful to you, do not do to anyone.”
- **Hinduism** (From the Mahabharata, 200 B.C.): “Do nothing to thy neighbor which thou wouldst not have him do to thee thereafter.”
- **Buddhism** (from the Udana-Varga): “Hurt not others with that which pains thyself.”
- **Christianity** (Jesus, 30 A.D.): “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”
- **Islam** (Imam Nawawi, 13th Century): “No one of you is a believer unless he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.”

The Golden Rule works for a wide range of decisions. Even in the most difficult situations, applying the “do unto others” standard can reveal which actions are ethical and which are not. If you don’t want to be deceived, don’t deceive others. If you want others to keep their commitments to you, keep your commitments to them.


**Courtesy and Decency**

Everybody loves Kayla because she’s the class clown and an expert prankster. At least once a week in biology, she finds a way to trick Mrs. Murphy, her elderly teacher. One day Kayla sets the clock ahead so the class gets to leave early. Another time, she puts funny pictures in the overhead projector, and they show up on the screen when Mrs. Murphy turns it on. Mrs. Murphy is sometimes on the brink of tears when the class laughs at her.

Today the students are dissecting sheep’s eyes, and Kayla slips an eyeball into Mrs. Murphy’s water glass. Almost everyone thinks this is going too far. Some kids want to warn Mrs. Murphy before she takes a sip of water, but nobody wants to cross Kayla because she’s so popular. Nobody except Hannah, that is. Hannah is a special education student with learning disabilities. She’s struggling in biology, but she has no trouble knowing what to do in this case. Just as Mrs. Murphy reaches for her water-glass, Hannah steps up, grabs the glass, and tosses the contents into the trash. Hannah knows from experience that everyone needs to be treated with courtesy and decency, and no one should be publicly humiliated.

**Tolerance and Acceptance**

Respect requires us to be accepting and tolerant of diverse ethnicities, beliefs, and levels of talent. Nick’s middle-school soccer team goes to the state championships, and the first team they meet on the field is from another city. While Nick’s team is mostly white and Asian, the players on the opposing team are all black and Latino. Nick’s coach immediately starts trash-talking the other team, spewing racial insults loud enough for both teams to hear. Nick has never seen this racist side of his coach before, and he doesn’t know what to do. He knows it’s wrong to disrespect the other kids because of the color of their skin, but he’s afraid to say anything to the coach because the coach decides who will play and who will sit on the bench during the games. What could Nick do in this situation? It’s especially tough for teens when adults are their problem. We’ll talk more about his later.
Bullying

Bullying is any attempt by a person or group to pick on someone with less power, with the intent to make that person feel bad and thus derive pleasure from that person’s pain. It is an extreme violation of respect. Physical bullying includes everything from shoving and punching to sexual harassment, stabbing, and shooting. Emotional bullying includes everything from name-calling and ridiculing to spreading rumors, writing harassing e-mails, texts, and web posts, and deliberately isolating someone.

Tess and Brooke eat lunch every day with the same friends they’ve known since elementary school. When Tess becomes the first in the group to have a boyfriend, the other girls become jealous and turn on her. At lunch they refuse to make room for her at the table, telling her she has to change her “slutty” behavior if she wants to sit with them. They no longer invite her to group outings on the weekends, they put mean notes in her locker, and they post insults on her Facebook page. Brooke hates what the girls are doing to Tess, but these are her only friends. If she sticks up for Tess, they may do the same things to her. It’s easy to see what Brooke should do (remember the Golden Rule), but it’s hard for her to actually do it.

Standing up to bullies in the name of respect takes moral courage, but it’s worth it. Your school is more than just a place you have to go every day. It’s a community, and it has a culture. Every member of the community contributes to that culture, whether they do so intentionally or accidentally. When students tolerate bullying, school becomes a place dominated by fear and anger, and everyone just tries to survive. When students refuse
to tolerate bullying, school becomes a place where people can concentrate on learning and building friendships. Every time you make the decision to respect your peers and to demand that they respect each other, you help build a culture of kindness that makes happiness possible for everyone.

In addition to destroying a school’s culture, bullying can have life and death consequences. Oliver is a small, skinny boy who’s involved in the drama club and plays clarinet in the school orchestra. A gang of bigger boys has been pushing him around. They shove him off the walkways in the quad, grab his shirt, lift him off the ground, and call him names like “gay, queer, and homo.” Oliver dreads this daily treatment so much he’s been faking sick a lot and staying home. One day the bullies call him a “fag” and knock him to the ground. When Oliver bursts into tears, they yell, “Aw, go jump in front of a truck. No one would care if you did!” Oliver is so miserable that he actually considers doing what they say. This is another situation involving physical danger, and adults must be alerted immediately, both by Oliver and any other teens witnessing the ongoing bullying. In addition to warning adults of the danger, students who witness the bullying can step in and defend Oliver. In most cases bullying stops quietly and quickly as soon as someone stands up to it.

3. RESPONSIBILITY

Being responsible means being answerable for the choices we make. Responsible people recognize that their actions matter, and that they must accept the blame for any consequences of their decisions. They know they have free will to make a right or wrong choice, and it’s up to them alone to honor or ignore their own ethical principles. Ethical people show responsibility by being accountable, pursuing excellence, and exercising self-restraint. Simply put, they do what they are supposed to do. Consequently, they are trusted by others, and that trust gives them the freedom necessary to be happy. One brief example of this in action: Lucille doesn’t have her own car, but because she consistently uses her father’s car responsibly, picking up her brother from karate practice and running errands, her father lets her take the car to go out with her friends.
Accountability

Do you know someone who always has an excuse, who says things like, “It wasn’t my fault! No one told me it was my job!” Accountable people don’t make excuses. They see when they should step up and take action. They consider the consequences of their actions, and they take responsibility for those consequences. They know that to simply do or say nothing is a choice too, and one that can allow immorality to triumph.

Clayton is leaving the Homecoming Dance when he passes a large, noisy crowd in the parking lot. The boys in the crowd are hooting and laughing and waving beer bottles.

A shrill scream from the center of the mob pierces the darkness. Clayton can’t tell what’s going on, but the sound of that scream scares him, so he pushes into the crowd. He can’t believe what he finds: two boys are holding another boy down on the ground, while a third is punching him in the face. No one around Clayton is doing anything to stop it. Clayton is afraid. There’s a real ugliness to the mood of this mob. He backs out quietly, goes to his car and locks the doors. He dials 911. This situation could have other solutions. Are any of those as good as this one?

Doing Our Best

When others rely on us, we have an ethical responsibility to do our best. If students are working on a group project, they owe it to the other group members to be diligent about completing their part of the work. They come prepared. Instead of giving up when they encounter obstacles, they persevere until they’re finished.
Eddie, a baseball player, joins the school’s production of *West Side Story*. He’s never sung or danced before – at least not in front of an audience – but he’s always wanted to, and the rehearsals go really well. But then his friends on the baseball team hear about his upcoming performance and they start relentlessly making fun of him. They call him names and threaten to attend opening night just so they can heckle him.

Eddie knows he shouldn’t let their jokes bother him, but when opening night arrives, he’s terrified. After a few minutes of panic, he takes some deep breaths. He tells himself that he might get laughed at, but he has a responsibility to swallow his fear and get onstage. The other members of the cast and crew have worked too hard for him to let his fear take over. When his cue arrives, he takes one last deep breath and runs out into the lights.

**Self-Restraint**

Responsible people exercise self-control. They can rein in passions such as anger and greed. They don’t abuse drugs or alcohol, and they don’t overeat or engage in risky sexual behavior. They trade instant gratification for long-term happiness.

Jessica is an excellent student, but she feels awkward around boys. When her friends go out on dates, she stays home alone doing homework for her honors classes. She is flattered when Nathan asks her to a weekend party. She thinks Nathan is cute, and this will be her first real date. The more Jessica and her friends talk it up beforehand, the more excited she gets. Until she gets to the party, that is. There are no parents at the house and only a handful of teens. The other couples are disappearing into the various bedrooms.

Nathan starts kissing Jessica and pulling her toward a bedroom door. Jessica enjoys the kissing, but he is going way too fast. She’d hoped he was as interested in getting to know her as she was in getting to know him, but it seems he’s only interested in hooking up with her. Jessica is afraid he’ll lose interest in her if she turns him down, but she doesn’t want to make out with someone she doesn’t really know or feel comfortable with. There are critical values at stake in Jessica’s decision. It will take courage and responsibility for her to choose wisely. What’s the best decision she can make in this situation?
4. FAIRNESS

Fairness can be a tricky concept. It means being just and impartial, making our decisions based on as much information as we can gather, and without bias, favoritism, or pre-judging (prejudice). Fair people don’t let their own self-interest dictate their decisions. The concept of fairness seems simple, but it can be surprisingly hard to apply in everyday life.

Impartiality

Everyone at school is excited about this weekend’s football game. Jack, the star quarterback, has been unstoppable throughout the entire season. Unstoppable on the football field, that is. Jack is failing to keep up the C average he needs to continue to play. So Jack approaches Brianna, the student tutor for his physics class, and asks her for a favor. Brianna is happy that Jack is even talking to her, much less asking her for something. Jack tells Brianna that if he fails this week’s physics exam he’d like her to change his grade to a C when she enters it in the teacher’s computer. Brianna is torn. She wants Jack to play this weekend as much as anyone, but is it fair to the other students in the class to play favorites and fraudulently raise his grade? Besides the issue of fairness, trustworthiness (honesty) comes into play. You will find that many decisions involve more than one Pillar value.

Logical Process

Sam is babysitting for the triplets next door. When he comes outside with popsicles, all three of them are crying and yelling at each other. Sam doesn’t even ask what has happened. He snaps at Hunter, “Go to your room. No popsicle for you!” Then he hands popsicles to the other two boys and eats the third one himself.
Sam has been unfair to Hunter because he has failed to use an impartial process to seek out the information he needed to reach his conclusion. Sam just assumed Hunter was the cause of the trouble and punished him unfairly. Making fair decisions means doing your best to get all of the relevant information.

5. CARING

Living a happy life is about having good relationships with other people. If you were alone in the world, even if you had every other possible distraction, without friends or family you’d eventually find yourself bored to tears. Caring for others is at the heart of ethics and ethical decision making. It’s impossible to be truly ethical – and truly happy – without caring about others.

Caring people are kind, loving, and compassionate. They have empathy, the ability to understand and feel the pain or pleasure of other people. The highest form of caring is altruism, or sacrificing your own self-interest for the benefit of someone else. Caring people aren’t mean, cruel, selfish, or self-centered.

Let’s go back to that lunch table (page 14) where Tess’s former friends are bullying her, and Brooke sees that they are treating Tess with cruelty and disrespect. Brooke has empathy: she can feel how heartbroken Tess is at this betrayal by their long-time friends. Brooke feels compassion: she’s sorry for Tess’s pain and wants to help her. Brooke’s well-developed instincts for empathy and compassion are going to give her the push she needs to do the ethical thing. She will pair her heart with her head and follow some rational decision-making steps, which we’ll get to in just a few pages. She’ll translate her caring instincts into an altruistic act – standing up to her own life-long friends for someone else.

Acts like these are the building blocks of a culture of kindness. By demonstrating her respect for Tess and showing that she won’t tolerate the other girls’ disrespect, Brooke will take a crucial step in increasing her own happiness and that of the people around her. It might take a while for the bullying girls to realize how much happier they’ll be when they stop bullying, but they’ll come around.
6. CITIZENSHIP

Good citizens contribute to the public good, the good of their school, their neighborhood, and their community. They know the laws and rules, and they obey them. They pay attention to the news, so they can vote responsibly and help address problems in their community. They do their share to be good neighbors by volunteering and protecting the environment. Good citizens give more than they take, and studies show that people who serve their community are happier than people who don’t.

Amir is a model citizen, almost. He picks up his lunch trash every day at school and throws it into the proper recycling bin. He rides the shuttle to school twice a week instead of adding to pollution by driving every day. He also volunteers at the local food pantry. Amir’s one violation of good citizenship occurs when he’s driving late at night. If he comes to a red light, he looks around to see if there is any other traffic or a police car in sight. If not, Amir runs the red lights.

Obeying laws and rules even when they seem arbitrary or are not enforced is a tradeoff we make for order in our society. Good citizens obey the law even when it’s not to their advantage or they know they won’t be caught. Amir needs to stop at the red lights for the same reason he throws his trash away. If he left his lunch trash on the table, and so did everyone else, the cafeteria would be a disgusting mess. If everyone driving late at night drove like Amir, there would be many more accidents and injuries.
III. Groundwork For Making Effective Ethical Decisions

We’ve identified the six core values that are the foundation for our ethics: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. Now we will lay the groundwork for applying those values.

Take Important Choices Seriously

It’s OK to make decisions spontaneously when they’re not important. We don’t have to give much thought to picking out a cereal for breakfast or a sweatshirt for a bike ride. But important choices demand that we take them seriously and consider them more carefully. How do you know which decisions are the major ones? Here’s one simple formula: the greater the potential consequences, the greater the need for careful decision making.

Remember the example of Spencer and Adam (page 11) Spencer suspects that Adam and his friends might bring a gun to school. The threat of physical harm and serious emotional pain should set off immediate alarms that this is an important matter that requires serious attention.

Good Decisions Are Both Ethical and Effective

Good decisions have two components. They are both ethical and effective. That is, they’re ethical because they honor our core values, and they’re effective because they accomplish our goals.

Hope has plans to go to the movies with her friend Samantha. An hour before they’re supposed to meet, Dylan phones Hope and invites her to a party that night. Hope has a huge crush on Dylan and really wants to go out with him. But she promised Samantha a week ago they would go out, and she doesn’t want to break her promise. Hope’s goals are to have a date with Dylan and still preserve her friendship with Samantha. There are several options here, and Hope considers them all.
Notice that in the example above, Hope has short-term and long-term goals. Her short-term goal is to have a date with Dylan. If she forgets about her long-term goal, preserving her friendship with Samantha, she will choose immediate gratification and go out with Dylan. It’s important to weigh all the potential consequences of our decisions to make sure not only that we are doing the right thing, but also that we aren’t sabotaging our long-term goals and future happiness. Then our decisions will be ethical and effective.

### Discernment and Discipline

There are two critical steps to ethically sound decisions: knowing what to do and doing it.

**Discernment.** The first step in making good decisions is *discernment*. It’s not always obvious that a decision

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<th>ETHICAL/NOT EFFECTIVE</th>
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<td>Hope refuses to go out with Dylan, saying that she already has plans. She is honest, loyal, and reliable, and Samantha remains her friend. But she loses out on the date and never hears from Dylan again.</td>
<td>Hope tells Dylan she’d rather stay in, and she invites him to come to her house instead of to the party. She makes up an excuse to Samantha. Hope gets her date with Dylan, and Samantha doesn’t find out. But Hope violates honesty, loyalty, and reliability.</td>
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<td>Hope lies to Samantha and tells her she has the flu. She then goes to the party with Dylan. Hope gets the date, but Samantha finds out she was at the party, and Hope loses Samantha’s friendship.</td>
<td>Hope tells Dylan the truth, that she already has plans. But she lets him know how sorry she is, and she offers to go out the following night. She is honest, loyal, and reliable. She preserves her friendship with Samantha, and she still has a date with Dylan.</td>
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even has an ethical side to it. Hope might just assume that a first date naturally has priority over a girls’ night out. It takes knowledge to discern when to apply our core values and how to apply them. Then it takes judgment to discern, or understand, solutions that satisfy both our values and our goals.

**Discipline.** Once we figure out what do, we need the discipline, or strength of character, to actually do it. It’s not enough to know the ethical and effective course; we must follow it. This often takes willpower or moral courage: the ability to do the right thing even when it’s hard. Hope knows that when she turns Dylan down, she’s risking something. He may be interested only in having a date for this party, and he may not care enough to wait for another occasion. In that case Hope is probably better off not going out with him, but still, it takes discipline for her to honor her friendship and take that risk.

**Stakeholders**

Each person affected by a decision has an interest, or a stake, in the decision and a moral claim on the decision maker. To make good decisions, we have to take into account the possible consequences for everyone potentially affected by our choice. They are the stakeholders.

Alex is driving his friends to the local pool parlor on a Saturday night. He stops to pick up the last boy in the group, whose parents are away for the weekend. The boy invites them all in for a few beers. Alex doesn’t drink any beer because he is driving, but then the boys start to place bets on the upcoming game of pool. Alex thinks he can win at pool and earn some money if he just has a couple of beers to relax his jitters. However, he will be risking driving under the influence of alcohol. Alex would be placing his passengers (stakeholders) in danger, as well as other people driving on the road that night (more stakeholders). If Alex damages his parent’s car, his parents (stakeholders) will have to waste time and money getting it repaired. How does the possible glory of winning that game of pool and a few dollars compare with the possible cost in blood and money to a half dozen other people?
Considering all the stakeholders in your decisions can make it easier to discern the right choice. And you can see how considering the stakeholders could make Alex’s life happier in the long run. If he were to crash the car and injure his friends, his regret over their injuries and the money he’d have to earn to reimburse his parents would be a heavy price to pay for a bad choice.
IV. The Three Steps To Better Decisions

We’ve established our values and our basic groundwork for ethical decisions. Now we’re going to walk through the three steps we should take for every important ethical choice.

THREE STEPS TO BETTER DECISIONS

1. **CONSIDER STAKEHOLDERS:** Take into account the interests and well-being of everyone likely to be affected by your actions (stakeholders).

2. **CONSIDER CORE VALUES:** Put the core values of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship above others.

3. **CONSIDER GREATEST GOOD:** If it’s necessary to violate one core ethical value to honor another, do what will produce the greatest amount of good in the long run.

Let’s take a difficult situation and use the three steps to reach a decision. Dominic has been accepted to his state university and he has won a full scholarship. All he has to do now is keep up his grades for the rest of senior year. Dominic’s family is very poor, so he is working an evening job in addition to his academic schedule and daily swim team practice. He’s so overworked that his grades are suffering. Dom asks his best friend Jesse to write a history paper for him to keep him from failing history. Jesse wants to help his friend. He knows that if he doesn’t, Dom could lose the scholarship and his acceptance at the university. What should Jesse do?

1. **CONSIDER STAKEHOLDERS.**

People – especially teenagers – often act quickly and impulsively. You may have heard the advice to count to 10 when you’re angry, but this works for decision making too. Pausing and reflecting prevents us from making rash decisions that we may later regret. Instead of just automatically agreeing to write the paper, Jesse tells Dominic he’ll think about it. That way he’ll have time to consider all of possible solutions to the problem.
The first stakeholder Jesse considers is Dominic. He wants to help his friend save his grade and his scholarship. But Jesse is a stakeholder too. He wants to attend college (something he could endanger if he were caught cheating), and he wants to remain a person of honor and integrity, upholding his own core values. So how can Jesse help Dominic pass the class while maintaining his integrity?

Jesse doesn’t assume that writing the paper for him is the only option. He asks Dominic about swim practice and his other classes. He quizzes him about his schedule at the grocery store where they both work. Jesse goes to Dominic’s sister Bella and asks for her input. Bella supplies some information that Dominic has forgotten. Dom has to take two different buses to get to work. This is also very time-consuming.

After putting some thought into it, Jesse decides he has five options:

1. Write the history paper for Dominic.
2. Refuse to write the history paper for Dominic.
3. Lie to Dominic’s swim coach for him, telling him Dominic is too sick to practice this week, so Dominic will have time to study and write his own paper.
4. Work Dominic’s shift at the grocery store for a couple of nights, so Dom will have time to study and write the paper himself.
5. Lend his car to Dominic so he’ll save time on the bus each day and have time to study and write the paper.
2. CONSIDER CORE VALUES.

Once Jesse has developed his options, he holds each one up to the Six Pillars of Character to see if it violates the core values: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. He knows that writing the paper violates trustworthiness (it’s cheating) and responsibility (it’s breaking the rules). On the other hand, simply refusing to write the paper violates Jesse’s caring and compassion for his long-time friend. Lying to Dominic’s swim coach also violates trustworthiness. Working Dominic’s shifts at the grocery store would be OK with the store manager and doesn’t violate any of the Six Pillar values. Likewise, lending Dom his car doesn’t violate any core values.

The problem with working Dominic’s shifts at the store is that Dominic’s family members are also stakeholders: they depend on Dominic’s paycheck to pay the bills. They could be hurt by that choice. Dom would benefit from the loan of the car, but if he were to crash the car, he would have a hard time paying for the damage, and Jesse, also a stakeholder, would have to pay for it. The consequences from the various options are that Jesse could compromise his values, get caught cheating, work extra hours, or risk damage to his car.

3. CONSIDER GREATEST GOOD.

When you have a choice to make, eliminate all of the unethical or illegal choices. Jesse eliminates writing the paper and lying to the coach because they’re unethical. He eliminates simply refusing to write the paper because it violates caring for his friend. He’s left with two acceptable options, working Dom’s hours and lending Dom his car. What do you do when there’s more than one acceptable ethical choice? Consider which choice will do the greatest good, or, as we phrased it earlier, produce the best possible result.

BEST POSSIBLE RESULT

Jesse has two options that are ethically sound. He needs a way to find the best possible result, or BPR, so he compares the two options to see which has the fewest potential negative consequences and the most potential benefits.
Negative consequences:

Jesse has already determined that working for Dominic at the grocery store could deprive Dom’s family of much-needed income. To address that, Jesse is willing to give them the cash he earns or offer Dom his work hours the following week. If Jesse lends Dom the car, Dom could have an accident and end up in a worse financial situation than he is in now.

Potential Benefits:

When he compares the potential benefits, Jesse realizes that working Dom’s store hours would save Dom more time than lending him the car.

Best Possible Result:

Jesse decides to work Dom’s shift for him this week, and lets Dom have his own work hours the following week. It’s the Best Possible Result because it gives Dom the most free time now, when he needs it, and doesn’t cost his family any money. It took a lot of problem solving, but this is an ethical and effective choice.

What if there are changes in circumstances? Jesse knows his decision may involve some possibilities he can’t foresee. He pays attention to what happens the week after he works Dom’s grocery store hours. As it turns out, Dom is too busy to work all the hours Jesse offers him that week. So Jesse divides his own grocery store hours in half, and gives only half of them to Dom that week, and then half again the following week, so Dom can regain the money he lost by not working. Sometimes real-life circumstances and new information make it necessary to modify our original decision.

Strategies for Tough Choices

When a dilemma involves conflicting values, sometimes it’s difficult to see which is the most ethical choice. Tonya works the cash register in a pharmacy. Tonya’s mother has suffered a severe back injury and has no health insurance. The emergency room at the county hospital won’t give her the surgery she needs, and the pain pills she’s been prescribed aren’t working. Tonya knows there are stronger pain medications at her pharmacy, and she can’t stand seeing her mother suffer. She’s emotionally torn between her values of caring and loyalty to
her mother, trustworthiness, and responsibility to her job. What should she do?

There are three strategies Tonya can use to help her clarify her ethical choice:

- **Talk to people whose judgment you respect.** Seek out friends and mentors, but remember, once you’ve gathered opinions and advice, the ultimate responsibility is still yours.

- **What would you do if you were sure everyone would know?** Would you be proud if the local news team did a story on your choice, or if someone posted it on Facebook? Choices that only look good if no one knows are always bad choices. Good choices make us worthy of respect and build good reputations.

- **The Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.** Remember, the Golden Rule is one of the oldest and most universal guides to ethical decision making. If we treat people the way we want to be treated, we are likely to live up to the Six Pillars of Character and lead happier lives.
V. Excuses for Unethical Choices: Rationalizations

Sometimes doing the right thing costs more than we want to pay. These situations are the biggest tests of our character. Sometimes in these cases we rationalize to get out of doing the right thing. Rationalizing is giving self-serving and false excuses for our behavior. Here are some of the most common rationalizations. If you hear yourself making them, a buzzer should go off in your head.

• **Everyone does it.**

  The oldest excuse in the book. Ethics isn't about the way things are. It's about the way things should be. A hundred years ago, almost everyone practiced racial segregation. Was that OK? Ethics isn't based on the number of people who choose a behavior at the moment, but on lasting universal values.

• **It's legal, so it must be OK.**

  What's legal isn't always ethical. It's legal to cheat on your steady boyfriend. Does that make it right? Sometimes our ethics require us to do more than the law allows, as in being loyal to your boyfriend or honest about dating other people. Sometimes our ethics require less than the law allows (as in driving slower than the speed limit in bad weather).

• **It's just part of the job. I was just following orders.**

  That's what Nazi soldiers said in the death camps. No matter who is telling you what to do, you are ultimately accountable to your own conscience.

• **It's for a good cause.**

  It's a tempting way to justify bad behavior, but no, the end doesn't justify the means.
• I was doing it for you.

“Sparing your feelings” is a common excuse for “little white lies.” Here’s a test to see if a white lie is ethical: if the other person found out about the lie, would she feel that you were being considerate, or that you had patronized or manipulated her?

• It doesn’t hurt anyone.

Is there really a situation in which violating ethical principles doesn’t hurt anyone? People use this rationalization sometimes when they give special favors to family and friends, use their positions for personal gain, or take something from a large, impersonal corporation. The harm is not as easy to see, but someone somewhere is being treated unfairly, or there is damage that may be shared a little bit by a large number of people. The test for this excuse is to ask yourself, “What if everyone did this?” If everyone pirated music, for example, composers and performers wouldn’t be fairly paid for their work. Every time you illegally download a song, you steal from those artists.

• I’m just fighting fire with fire.

You’re old enough to know that bad behavior is not all right just because the other person does it. If someone takes your water bottle or bumps you off the running track, you aren’t justified in getting even by stealing something from them. Two wrongs never have and never will make a right.

• I deserve this. They owe me.

If your wage at the coffee shop is low, you may feel that it’s all right to make up for that by giving yourself little “bonuses”: a stolen coffee and cookie here and there, or maybe you check your Facebook page on your phone when you should be working. Lying and stealing are still lying and stealing, no matter what you’re being paid.
VI. Special Circumstances

When You Have to Tell an Adult

Consider Oliver again (page 15), the boy who is being bullied so harshly that he’s actually considering suicide. Then think about Spencer, who realizes his friend Adam is going to take a gun to school (page 11). These situations have something in common: people are in serious danger and their parents have somehow missed the warning signs. Both kids have friends and classmates who know about the danger but are reluctant to speak up. In life-threatening situations like these, it’s important that you immediately tell an adult. There are also other circumstances in which people do things that are dangerous but not necessarily life-threatening. These can include bulimia (throwing up to try to lose excessive amounts of weight), “cutting” one’s skin with a razor blade in places that can’t be seen, or abusing painkillers.

When someone you know is in physical danger, their safety is your highest priority. If you can’t convince your friend to ask for help, then you have to do it. Parents and teachers will be more understanding than you might think, and you can’t shoulder the responsibility of keeping your information secret. What if something happened to your friend? Truly loyal and caring friends place their friend’s safety above all other considerations.

When Adults Are the Problem

Sometimes adults are the bad influence in our lives. Remember Nick, the soccer player whose coach is spewing racist insults at the other team? (page 13) And what about parents who routinely yell disrespectful comments at the opposing coaches and referees during the match? Or the alcoholic dad who invites his young son to drink with him? What can a kid do when the adults seem to have all the power, but their behavior is clearly wrong?
There are some options:

First of all, don’t imitate them. You might not have power over adults, but you do have power over your own actions. Nick and his teammates must have compassion for the players on the opposing team, and they shouldn’t further hurt their feelings by imitating their coach.

Second, you can speak up. This may be one of those times where you will pay more than you want to for making the ethical choice. If Nick says, “Hey coach, back off!” the coach may indeed bench him and continue his racist name-calling. Or the coach may be embarrassed at being called out and stop. Either way, Nick has honored his values and stood up for the kids being mistreated. Talking to the coach privately afterwards, however, might be a more effective way to prevent the problem in the future.

Third, if you have real reason to fear the adult who is acting badly, ask a trusted adult for help. The son whose father offers him alcohol and gets violent when he’s drunk shouldn’t try to handle the situation by himself. Where can the boy turn to find a trustworthy adult? He might talk to his favorite teacher, the school counselor, his coach, priest, or rabbi. If he doesn’t feel comfortable talking to anyone he knows, he can get help or report abuse by calling the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD (800-422-4453). For more information on where kids can go for help, visit childhelp.org.

The Bystander Effect

When Clayton finds a large group of kids all gathered to watch a single boy being beaten (page 16), he can’t believe no one in the crowd is doing anything to stop it. He feels paralyzed.

Psychologists call this “the bystander effect.” Often the bystanders are afraid of being targeted, or they assume someone else in the crowd will call the authorities, so they don’t have to. Clayton perhaps judges rightly that the crowd of boys is too dangerous for him to stand up to all of them. But he also knows that each of us has a responsibility to try to help an innocent victim. Clayton acts on that duty and calls 911.

The reason for doing this is simple empathy: We know how much pain and suffering we’d feel if we were in that situation, so we do what we can to stop another person’s pain and suffering. If we don’t stand up for other people when they’re in trouble, we can’t possibly expect anyone else to stand up for us when we’re the ones in trouble.
VII. Becoming A Person
Of Character

“(Daddy said) ‘Children must look after their own upbringing.’ Parents can only give good advice or put them on the right paths, but the final forming of a person’s character lies in his own hands.”

Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl, March 7, 1944

Character and Conscience

*Having character* is shorthand for having *good* character. Good character isn’t something we inherit like looks or money. We have to create it ourselves, and we all have the opportunity to do that. When we consistently make good ethical decisions, we build character, and people respect us for it. It is up to you, and you alone, to make those good decisions. Character will come when you put your ethics into action. Year in and year out, your character will be tested and you will continue to build it. It’s a life-long project.

Listening to your conscience will help you build character. A well-developed conscience is like a moral GPS. When a situation requires us to apply ethical values (the Six Pillars) to our decision, our moral GPS senses which way is the right way and urges us to go in that direction. People with bad character have a bug in their moral GPS. The corrupted software might keep them from noticing when ethics are needed, or it might keep them from finding the moral courage to apply those ethics. Elvis Presley once said, “Your conscience gives you a tap on the shoulder and says, ‘Hold on.’ If you don’t listen, you’re a snake.” Lots of people ignore their consciences because it’s hard to listen.

On Happiness

Ask other teens why they get high on drugs or alcohol or engage in sex without intimacy or commitment. They’re likely to
tell you they just want to be happy. Ask young professionals why they’re so driven to make money. They’ll probably say buying expensive cars and houses will make them happy. Ask adults why they have affairs or leave their families and you’ll hear it again: “I just want to be happy.” So, why aren’t more people happy?

One problem is unrealistic expectations. Some people think happiness is a continuous emotional high, a sort of non-stop heavenly bliss. Others expect to feel that bliss when they achieve their goals. When they accomplish those goals and don’t feel the expected bliss, they’re depressed and disappointed. They fail to realize that you find happiness in the journey and not the destination. Helping others and trying your best to do something you’re passionate about are where you find true happiness.

There’s great danger in confusing happiness with pleasure and fun. Those who make pleasure-seeking the focus of their lives soon find themselves needing new and different sources of pleasure, like drug addicts who need continually higher doses to get high. Look at the movie stars whose bad behavior is recorded all over the Internet. Do they seem very happy?

True happiness is more like a feeling of peace and satisfaction with one’s life. There are three main sources of real happiness: loving relationships, enjoyable work, and service to others.

**Relationships**

In our teen years, friends can be the focal point of our lives. You probably depend on your friends a great deal for emotional support. Just make sure that the support (loyalty, caring, responsibility) flows back towards them too. (There’s that Golden Rule again.) And what about your family? Do you remember to show appreciation for your parents and siblings? Do you make a point to be there for family dinners and occasional family outings? Your family can be a refuge when the pressures of school and friendships start to crush in on you. Your friends may disperse and move away as time goes by, but your family can stay connected for the rest of your life. If you are loyal and caring toward your family members now, you will have the basis for life-long good relationships with them.
Work

Soon you will be choosing and preparing for your life’s work. If you choose well, your career will be a source of great fulfillment. Of course, not everyone has the luxury of finding a job they love. Emotionally rewarding jobs often don’t pay well and, after all, your job is your means of support. Still, too many people put up with boring or unbearable work situations because they place too much weight on salary and prestige and too little on the value of the work. When you decide on your career, take into account that choosing a lower-paid job that draws on your talents and interests or gives something back to your community could be an investment in happiness.

Service

Some people choose careers that specifically involve serving others. People who become doctors, nurses, firemen, policemen, teachers, and social workers almost always pursue these careers in order to serve others. But you don’t have to choose a career in service in order to help others. Millions of Americans volunteer outside of work, donating time and money, feeding the homeless, building houses for struggling families, cleaning up natural areas, or even just helping friends and neighbors whenever they need it.

Helen Keller said, “True happiness is not attained through self-gratification, but through fidelity to a worthy purpose.” The philosopher Albert Schweitzer said, “One thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve.” Both of these great people recognized that happiness comes from service to others.

The Dalai Lama, the Tibetan spiritual leader, speaks often about the link between ethical behavior and happiness. He says, “Happiness is not something ready made. It comes from your own actions...If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”

We hope that you’ve found this book helpful, and that you use these decision-making tools to find true long-term happiness.
Review Questions

1. Define the word *stakeholder*. Who are the stakeholders in your decision to read this book? What are consequences of reading or not reading?

2. Why should you try your best to make good or right decisions? What's the payoff?

3. How can you figure out if you're making a good ethical decision or not?

4. Think of a bad decision you've made. It can be as small as deciding to say something mean to your brother or sister. Who was affected by your decision? What would have been a better decision that would have led to a better outcome? In general, how can you make better decisions that lead to better outcomes?

5. You’re checking out people’s Facebook pages when you see that one of your friends has started a whole page devoted to how much they hate a kid at school. Some of your other friends have already added their mean comments. What should you do? Who are all of the stakeholders in your decision? What steps should you take to achieve a good result for most stakeholders?

6. In general, why is cyberbullying wrong? Which of the Six Pillars of Character does it violate?
About CHARACTER COUNTS! and Josephson Institute Center for Youth Ethics

CHARACTER COUNTS! is a character development program in schools all over the world. It is administered by the nonprofit, nonpartisan, nonsectarian Josephson Institute Center for Youth Ethics.

CHARACTER COUNTS! provides professional-development programs for teachers and administrators, and develops teaching aids and products for educators, coaches, parents, and youth organizations. We offer many free resources for schools on our website, including a lesson plan bank, a quotations bank, the Character Educator blog, and anti-bullying strategies.

CHARACTER COUNTS! Week is endorsed by the President, the Senate, the House of Representatives, and governors and mayors all across the nation. In fact, it’s the largest celebration of character in the world. Your school can sign up for free resources on our website.

When character concepts are taught every day, students learn decision making skills that can improve the way they focus in class, treat others in the school community, and behave in the world at large. If you are a teacher or parent reviewing this booklet, please join us on our website or call us at 800-711-2670 for more information or a free school consultation.

Find hundreds of free resources at  
CharacterCounts.org  
Questions? Call 800-711-2670.