



## **Cheating: Here, There, Everywhere**

When it comes to cheating, we've all heard the same old songs:

- "It's only cheating if you do it on a test."
- "Our teacher doesn't seem to care or notice, so it's okay to cheat."
- "I'm only cheating this one time because I didn't have a chance to study."
- "Everybody's doing it, so it's alright for me to do it, too!"

Being a student means being exposed to all sorts of cheating situations, and deciding what's right and what's wrong can be pretty confusing. Even if you're super-serious about school, it's normal to find yourself tempted to cheat, especially when you're under a lot of pressure. It's also common to think that since so many other students are cheating, it's really not a big deal-especially if nobody gets caught.

But no matter what you've heard or what excuses you can come up with, cheating IS a big deal. It can make mega-trouble for you not just in school, but also with your family, friends, and, sometimes most importantly, yourself.

## **Cheating: What Counts, What Doesn't**

In February 2003, a sixth-grade boy in Florida sneaked onto his teacher's computer and changed five of his assignment grades. He got caught, suspended, and then expelled from school.

Okay, so that's obviously cheating. But sometimes it's not so easy to figure out if something counts as cheating or not, and it seems like everyone has his or her own opinion. So how can you decide for yourself?

Cheating in school is mostly about two things: **dishonesty** and **breaking the rules**.

Another important thing to remember about cheating is that **it applies to ALL your schoolwork**. That includes:

- Tests and quizzes
- Homework assignments
- Group projects
- Reports and papers
- Extra credit work

Here are some examples of being dishonest and/or breaking the rules:





**Why It's Lame:** School isn't supposed to be easy. If you already knew all the answers, you wouldn't actually learn anything. If you try your best and the material still seems way harder for you than anybody else, it's time to talk to your teacher, counselor or parent. Cheating to get better grades will just hide the problem and, in the long run, just make school even more difficult.

## II. THE EXCUSE: School is unfair.

- *"Other kids have advantages over me. Some are smart, some are teacher's pets, and some even get private tutors. The only way I can get the same grades is to cheat sometimes."*

**Why It's Lame:** Yep, some kids make it all look easy, and that can seem unfair. But cheating is just another way of being unfair, isn't it? Let's say that you're the high scorer on your school's basketball team. Another kid sees you making it look easy, and thinks this gives her an excuse to cheat. You'd be angry, right? Breaking the rules is not the way to even things up.

## III. THE EXCUSE: Everybody's doing it.

- *"Cheating is no big deal because all the kids do it, and only the ones who are obvious get caught."*

**Why It's Lame:** People -- kids *and* adults -- do all sorts of things because they think everyone else does them, like taking towels from hotel rooms or driving through "Stop" signs. However, the fact that a lot of people do it and don't get caught doesn't make it any less wrong. Cheating is against the rules for very good reasons, and the fact that someone else did it and got away with it doesn't change this. Try to make your own decisions about what's right and wrong, and stay true to them.

## IV. THE EXCUSE: It's only cheating if you do it on tests.

- *"My friends and I give each other the answers on homework and other stuff we do in class. It's not the same as cheating on a test."*

**Why It's Lame:** Homework and class projects are important ways to learn, and all students are supposed to finish their work on their own. Cheating on tests is one kind of cheating, but it's not the only kind. Any time you copy someone else's work or take credit for something you didn't do, it's still cheating, and it's still wrong.

## V. THE EXCUSE: It's not cheating, it's teamwork.

- *"We're supposed to cooperate with other kids, right? So why can't we work together and trade answers?"*

**Why It's Lame:** Sometimes teachers will assign group projects where you work with other students. But most assignments are supposed to be done by each student on his or her own, because this makes sure everyone understands every part of the lesson. If you only do half an assignment, and your friend does the other half, then each of you is only learning half the material, instead of both of you learning all of it. Even on group projects, each student is supposed to work hard, and if somebody ends up doing a lot less, this is a form of cheating.

#### **VI. THE EXCUSE: This subject isn't important.**

- *"I never cheat in my favorite classes, but some classes are just dumb, and the things they teach have nothing to do with my life."*

**Why It's Lame:** There are only so many hours in the school day, and school boards, teachers and parents work hard to make sure the subjects that get taught are the most important ones. There may be classes that you don't like or that don't come as easy to you, but this doesn't mean that the lessons aren't important. Getting a complete and well-rounded education means learning all kinds of different things, and you can't learn if you cheat.

#### **VII. THE EXCUSE: I don't like my teacher.**

- *"I don't like my teacher, and I don't think he likes me. So I just think it's okay to cheat in his class."*

**Why It's Lame:** Your feelings about your teacher shouldn't have anything to do with how you do your assignments and take tests. Although it's great to have a teacher that you like, the main job of a teacher is to help you learn, and you're expected to do your work and not cheat no matter who your teacher is. If you're having a real conflict with a teacher and it's affecting your attitudes about schoolwork, talk to a trusted adult about what's going on.

#### **VIII. THE EXCUSE: I don't have time to study.**

- *"I'm stressed for time every day. When I cheat, it's only because I've got so much going on that there's no time left to study."*

**Why It's Lame:** If you don't have enough time to study, consider cutting back on your other activities, not your schoolwork. Like it or not, school is meant to be your top priority, and if other interests are taking too much time and energy away from it, things probably have to change. Ask a parent to help you rearrange your schedule so you have enough time for schoolwork every single day.

## IX. THE EXCUSE: My parents expect perfect grades.

- *"My mom and dad put soooo much pressure on me about grades, they complain when I get B's and C's. I need A's. So I cheat."*

**Why It's Lame:** Most parents want their kids to get good grades because of what the grades represent: working hard and learning. In other words, it's *earning* the grade, not the grade itself, that's important. If you're having trouble earning the grades a parent expects of you, consider talking to her or him about what it would take to do better, including more time set aside for homework or outside tutoring. If you feel your parent's expectations are too high or putting too much pressure on you, you may want to discuss this with him or her, or with a school counselor.

## Cheating: Why It's Wrong

Now we know what's wrong and what isn't, but sometimes it's not so easy to understand WHY. Let's take a closer look at some of the reasons:

### **Cheating can get you in serious trouble**

Every school has a cheating policy, and punishments can be pretty harsh, starting with an automatic F or Zero on the test or assignment, and going all the way up to getting kicked out of school. If you cheat to get a better grade, you're taking a big risk of getting a much worse grade that will seriously set you back. Getting booted from school will set you back even more.

### **Cheating is unfair to you**

You've probably heard an old saying that goes: "When you cheat, you're really cheating yourself." Sure, it sounds corny, but it does make a lot of sense. School can help make you a better person in many ways, and help you learn the things you need to live a fulfilling life. If you never really learn these things because you're cheating, then all you're going to learn is how to cheat! It can be difficult to look towards the future like that when you're freaking about tomorrow's big test, but try to have faith in the big picture.

### **Cheating is unfair to your friends**

It's important to play fair in games and sports, and that goes for school, too. If you've ever had a friend who was so determined to win at all costs that she cheated at whatever game you played, you know how upsetting this can be. You're playing by the rules, and then someone does better than you by breaking the rules. It stinks, and it's unfair. When you cheat in school to get better grades, it's unfair to the kids who actually studied and did the work.

### **Cheating can lead to more cheating**

Have you ever told a lie, and then found that you had to tell more and more lies just to

hide the fact that you told a lie in the first place? Cheating can be like this, too. Say, for instance, someone didn't want to learn the multiplication table, so instead she wrote down the answers on her binder. When the class starts doing more difficult problems, she won't know the basics and might cheat to make up for it. Every time you cheat, you're not learning skills and lessons that could be important later on.

### **Cheating destroys trust**

In order for school to work smoothly, students and teachers have to trust one another. People who cheat are telling their teachers that they're not trustworthy, and this can make getting through the school year a lot more difficult. Your teacher might be suspicious of everything you hand in, and it can be very hard to win back that trust.

### **Cheating is the same as lying**

Some people who get away with cheating on a test or homework assignment will brag about it to friends, like it's something to be proud of or that proves how clever they are. But it's not so common to hear someone bragging about being a liar, right? That's because most of us don't think very highly of someone who lies. Think about this: every time you hand in schoolwork that you cheated on, it's like telling the teacher that you did it totally on your own. If this isn't true, then what you're doing is lying.

### **You can't be proud of cheating**

When you accomplish something on your own, it makes you proud. Remember the first time you rode a bike by yourself? It probably felt great. Now imagine that you never rode that bike by yourself, but always had training wheels to help you. You wouldn't be as proud, would you? Cheating is like having those training wheels on your bike all the time. You might get an A on a test or an assignment, but you'll know that you really didn't earn it.



### **Cheating: Take Action!**

Perhaps the most important thing to learn about cheating is that there are many, many ways to help keep it out of your life. Here are some ideas:

#### **Work with a parent or guardian**

- Understand your family's attitudes about cheating
- Talk about school in general, and be honest about how you're doing in your class subjects.

- If you've been feeling a lot of pressure about grades, talk about how these expectations make you feel.
- Ask for advice on doing better in school without having to cheat.
- If you're struggling, discuss options like extra help or other school study programs.
- If you don't have enough time to study, talk about cutting back on non-school activities.
- Ask adults about what they did about the problem of cheating when they were in school.
- Discuss the difference between earning good grades and getting them by cheating.

### **Work with your teachers or school counselors**

- Make sure you understand which activities your teacher views as cheating so that there's no question about it.
- Make sure you know all the rules and requirements for assignments and tests, and when it's okay to work with other students.
- When writing papers and projects, make sure you know all the rules about giving credit for quotes and other people's ideas.
- Make sure you know your school's official penalties for cheating.
- If you're struggling in class or finding the work too hard, tell your teacher or counselor about it.
- If you feel your teacher could do more to prevent cheating, be honest about it.
- If you know of ways that kids are getting away with cheating, discuss it with your teacher or counselor.

### **Work with your friends**

- Make sure your friends know that you want to earn the grades that you get.
- If you feel that cheating is a big deal, make sure your friends know this.
- Talk about how cheating is the same thing as lying.
- Talk about how cheating is unfair to those who actually do the work.
- Don't agree to trade answers on any assignments or tests.
- It's okay to study together, but remember that homework assignments should be completed alone.
- Don't offer your homework or assignments for anyone else to look at, and don't ask to look at anyone else's.
- Try not to sit near anyone who you know to be a cheater.
- Try not to support or congratulate anyone who finds a way to cheat.

### **Make it easy to resist the temptation to cheat**

- Take as little as possible into the test, like just your pencil and your brain.
- Don't write notes on anything that you could look at during a test.
- Keep all your books and papers where you can't easily see them.

- Keep your eyes on your paper, and sit away from your friends if you can.
- If somebody starts whispering to you, pretend you don't hear it.
- Cover up your paper so that others can't cheat off you.
- Try not to do anything that you would have to hide from your teacher.
- Relax, and focus on the answers that you do know.
- Try to accept that it isn't always possible to get a perfect grade, and do your best.

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