

# “You’re only cheating yourself”



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Contributor Michael Josephson.

It's in the news all the time – kids are cheating in school in new ways and at unprecedented rates.

One of the reasons is the way schools and parents deal with or ignore the underlying issues of integrity and character. For instance, to discourage kids from cheating, adults commonly say, “You’re only cheating yourself.”

Of course cheating damages credibility and character, but it's also dishonest and unfair. Cheaters don't just cheat themselves. They cheat everyone affected by their cheating, including honest students, who are put at a competitive disadvantage, and college admission officers and employers who think a student's grade accurately reflects his or her competence. What's more, cheaters dishonor their families, teachers, and schools.

When we tell kids they're cheating themselves because they aren't learning the material, we have to remember that most kids who cheat think what they're asked to learn is unimportant. They're quite comfortable not knowing the value of X or the capital of Zimbabwe. As to mastering skills, cynical and coldly pragmatic students believe that learning to cheat is more useful than learning the material.

Finally, it's dangerous to promote self-centered, cost-benefit calculations about cheating in a way that ignores or minimizes the crucial moral issues of honesty and honor. Nearly two-thirds of high school students cheat on exams because they're not afraid of getting caught and they get better grades.

To address the problem, we must promote integrity, not self-interest, and we must tell kids that whether they get away with it or not, cheating's wrong.

Of course, it helps if we really believe that.

This is Michael Josephson reminding you that character counts.



*Michael Josephson is an influential and internationally renowned champion of character education for youth and ethical conduct in business, government, policing, journalism, sports, healthcare and law. He is credited by many as the person most responsible for reviving and professionalizing the character education in school and youth-serving organizations. In 1992, under the auspices of the Josephson Institute he created CHARACTER COUNTS!, the world's most widely implemented character development initiative based on a common language of shared values – the Six Pillars of Character) and Pursuing Victory With Honor (1996), a companion program promoting ethics in sports.*

Learn more about character education.