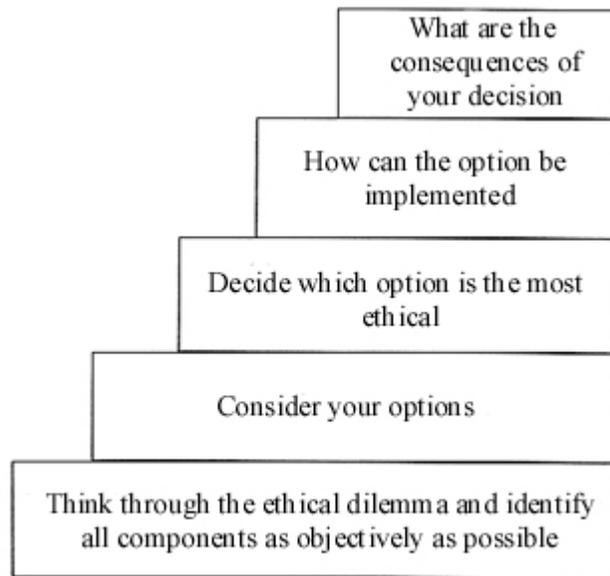


## Steps to ethical decision making



(Boatman, 1987)

## Dilemma 1

Georgia's hands were sweating. She was fifteen minutes into her math final when she began to panic. This exam was worth most of her grade in the class. She understood math—even liked it—and usually did really well. Her constant problem was that she wasn't a strong test-taker. Her grades never reflected her understanding of the material she studied.

Now, here she was, once again stuck on one problem worth twenty-five points on the test, and she was drawing a blank. She put her head down on the desk and concentrated as hard as she could. She remembered doing a similar problem in class and explaining it to her friend Jessie, but now she was so stressed out by the test, she couldn't even remember how to begin the problem.

She lifted her head and stared at her test. She listened to the clock tick on the wall and imagined her parents' expression when she receives her report card. Jessie was sitting right in front of her. He is always a good test taker and had already solved the problem. The teacher had his back turned and was on the other side of the room. Georgia could look over Jessie's shoulder, get the answer, and no one would know.

Georgia needed to think quickly. She thought about how unfair it was that she regularly does badly on tests even though she works so hard in class and understands the material, too. She thought about how often she helped Jessie in class throughout the semester. What should she do?

She prided herself on doing what was right. But how right is it that she has to work in a system that doesn't reward such hard work?

Finally, she took a deep breath. She looked to see if the teacher was still on the other side of the room, and glanced over Jessie's shoulder just long enough to get the final answer to the question. Then, she figured out the rest of the problem on her own. In the moment, she felt great about her decision. She felt she had sort of created an ethical compromise.

But on the way home on the bus, Georgia's good feelings started to fade. "What exactly is an ethical compromise anyway?" she thought to herself. Should she tell her teacher what she did or move forward and forget about the whole thing?

## Dilemma 2

Jeff and his best friend, Steven go to different high schools. They've been friends since third grade, but since Jeff transferred to another school for 10th grade, they've started to grow apart.

One Saturday, Steven asked Jeff if he would drive him into the nearest city. He didn't have his license yet and said he thought it would be fun for them to hang out. Jeff felt uncomfortable saying yes because he'd only had his license for six months and his parents told him he wasn't allowed to drive into the city yet. But, Steven said that he wouldn't be able to go without Jeff's help and they never got to see each other anymore. Jeff agreed and they left that afternoon after telling Jeff's parents they were driving to another friend's house.

When they got to the city, Steven asked Jeff to drive across town to a particular address. When they arrived, Steven asked Jeff to wait in the car while he ran inside for a few minutes. After Steven returned to the car Jeff asked what was going on and Steven pulled out a bag of white powder. He admitted it was his drug connection and that the powder was crystal meth. When Jeff asked him why he didn't tell him that was why they came to the city. Steven said he didn't tell him because he figured Jeff wouldn't go.

That night Jeff couldn't sleep because he felt overwhelmed by what he had found out. He knew meth was no good and that Steven would continue using it with or without his help. He was angry that Steven had put him in the position of driving with an illegal substance, but even more importantly, he was worried about his friend.

Jeff had promised Steven he wouldn't tell anyone about all this but it was driving him crazy. He had a teacher at school he really liked and trusted. He wanted to go to him and ask his advice. But what if the teacher decided to turn in his best friend? Jeff was torn about how best to protect Steven.

## Dilemma 3

Brendan was in third grade when he was caught cheating on his math quiz. He had been doing poorly in math and his parents had threatened that if he didn't raise his grades they wouldn't let him play on the baseball team. So he cheated. When the teacher asked him about it, he denied it at first, but finally admitted to writing down the answers ahead of time.

A parent conference was called and Brendan had to sit with his parents, the teacher, and the principal to discuss the school policy on cheating and lying. On the way home, his father told Brendan he was deeply disappointed in him and expected more from him in the future. That night, Brendan felt like the whole world was against him, but he also felt guilty for letting his parents down.

That weekend, Brendan and his family went to a movie. When they got to the ticket window Brendan's dad asked for children's tickets for both Brendan and his 16 year old brother. Brendan looked over at his brother, who stared down at the sidewalk and hunched his shoulders hoping the ticket seller wouldn't notice that he was well above the age for a child's ticket. The ticket seller glanced suspiciously back and forth between the father and the brother, and then, with a doubtful look on her face, she handed them the two child's tickets. This happened every time they went to the movies, and it always made Brendan feel weird.

On the way home from the movie, Brendan asked his father why it was okay to lie and cheat the theater out of money but not to cheat on his math quiz. His dad responded that sometimes its okay to lie as long as nobody gets hurt.

The rest of the way home Brendan just got more and more confused. Cheating on his test hurt nobody. He didn't steal the answers from any of the other students. If he hadn't gotten caught, he would have been praised. How was what he did different from what his dad did over and over again? And should he continue to stay silent the next time his dad lied?

Stephanie is in ninth grade and, until recently, felt pretty lucky. She had a good group of friends, was fairly popular, and was doing okay academically. The fall was hard because starting high school meant meeting a whole new group of people and teachers. Things were just beginning to get easier, and now she was in trouble.

Stephanie always thought of herself as a good friend but two weeks ago she found herself in a pretty big dilemma. One of her good friends, Rebecca, had confided to her that she liked a guy in the sophomore class. Stephanie had offered to go talk to him for her. When Stephanie told the boy that Rebecca was interested in him, he told Stephanie he might be interested but also asked if Stephanie wanted to hang out that Saturday at a local party. It didn't seem like that big a deal when Stephanie said yes, but on Saturday, she let things get carried away and the two made out. She didn't even know why she did it. It just seemed really cool that he was into her and, quite frankly, she just wasn't thinking.

To make matters worse, Rebecca came to her on Monday and asked if Stephanie knew anything about what was going on with this guy. She had heard that he had gotten together with someone else and Rebecca was upset. Stephanie knew she should just tell Rebecca the truth, but she didn't want to lose her friendship. She wanted to find a way where Rebecca wouldn't find out what happened and Stephanie wouldn't lose any friends. She had to think fast. She panicked, and told Rebecca she had heard a rumor that he had hooked up with a certain other girl in their class.

Now, everything felt like it was spinning out of control. The boy wasn't talking, but after Rebecca confronted the accused girl she wanted Rebecca to set up a meeting so she could talk to Stephanie. This was a mess. What was Stephanie supposed to do now?

## Dilemma 5

**Tina** considered herself a pretty assertive young woman. She was sixteen but felt her confidence in both her values and her place in the world was stronger than most of her peers. That made Saturday night even more surprising and harder to deal with. She had gone to a party her parents agreed she could attend. In arranging a ride, her mother had called the parents of an acquaintance of Tina's she knew from chorus. Chris lived nearby and Tina's parents thought they could carpool. It was decided that Tina's mother would drive the two of them to the party and Chris's father would drive them home.

The problem arose at the end of the night when Chris' dad arrived to pick them up. When Tina opened the passenger door of the car, the smell of alcohol washed over her. She got in and thanked Chris's Dad for coming to get them. He slurred his words when he responded but seemed to be able to drive okay.

Tina was close to her parents and respected how often they told her never to get in the car with someone who was drinking. They also told her if she ever felt uncomfortable to call home and they would pick her up, no questions asked. But, what if the driver was a friend of her parents and an adult? She hadn't ever considered that as a possibility and now that she was, she was 20 minutes from home smack in the middle of the problem.

Chris was acting like everything was fine. Tina felt very uncomfortable. All of her confidence had disappeared. She felt like a robot just going through the motions. What could she do? She felt like all the rules had changed and she had no options.