Fact Sheet

How can we raise ethical kids despite the prevalence of lying, cheating and stealing? Corrupt business practices within large corporations. Athletes discovered using steroids to gain a competitive advantage. Adults embellishing resumes to be considered for jobs or college entrance. Celebrities caught lying or cheating. Is it any wonder that a growing number of students believe that in order to succeed in life, everyone cheats? Among many students today there seems to be a nonchalant attitude about cheating and lying – a generation of young adults who don’t feel bad about these behaviors. And the trend is disturbing:

The Josephson Institute’s Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth (2004) reported the following statistics. In the 12-month period prior to being surveyed,

- 62% of high school students reported cheating on exams
- 35% of high school students reported copying a document from the Internet
- 23% admitted to cheating in order to win a sporting event
- 82% of students admitted to lying to their parents
- 62% admitted to lying to their teachers
- 27% of high school students report having stolen from a store
- 22% reported stealing something from a parent or a relative
- 18% admitted to stealing something from a friend
- Astonishingly, 29% of those surveyed admitted to lying on one or two questions on the survey!

The most ironic fact, however, is that the same students also reported having a high regard for honesty, trust and good character in school, at home and in the workplace.

What can parents and educators do to understand the triggers for cheating and ensure cheating is not ignored or rewarded? According to a recent national survey (June 2005) by leading expert Donald McCabe, Rutgers University, 88% of faculty reported that they observed some form of serious cheating, yet 32% never did anything about it.
Why kids cheat. Author Robert Harris tells readers of Anti-Plagiarism Strategies for Research Papers (as quoted by, “Put an End to Plagiarism in Your Classroom” by Linda Starr from Education World) that kids plagiarize and cheat for all kinds of reasons:

- Pressure from parents and themselves to succeed
- Poor example set by parents
- School work is not a top priority
- They run out of time or want to finish the work quickly
- They don’t know the rules of citing references and/or plagiarism

The challenge for the future is to help children and young adults see how their actions must reflect their beliefs. Often this will come as adults scrutinize their own behavior and model a life of integrity and honesty.

Resources:
Education World, www.education-world.com
Josephson Institute, www.josephsoninstitute.org
KidsHealth, www.kidshealth.org