

# Cheating in School: Facts, Consequences & Prevention

February 24, 2014

There have always been kids that have chosen to cheat in school, but today's tech gadgets have made it easier and more common than before. With the majority of teens and tweens carrying cell phones, answers to test questions can zing around a classroom in minutes. Here are some examples of the ways teens are cheating at school:

Kids have programmed answer sheets into their iPods or recorded course materials into their MP3s and played them back during exams. Students have text-messaged test questions (or used their camera phones to picture-message tests) to friends outside the classroom. When essays are assigned, some students simply cut and paste text from websites directly into their papers. Some students prep for pop quizzes by inputting math formulas or history dates into their programmable calculators. Students can buy term papers from a growing number of online "paper mills," such as [schoolsucks.com](http://schoolsucks.com), for up to \$10 a page.



In a recent survey of 18,000 students at 61 middle and high schools:

66% admitted to cheating on exams,

80% said they had let someone copy their homework

58% said they had committed plagiarism

Our society seems to promote that you should do whatever it takes to win or succeed. Children don't like to lose. Our culture appears to say that it is acceptable to step on others as you climb ahead. Some parents have contributed to the problem by not focusing their attention on instilling positive values – such as honesty, doing your best, and integrity – and instead pressuring their children to excel. Some parents are afraid that their child won't have a good job or life if they don't get to the best college, which requires the best grades. Nearly one-third of teens and 25% of tweens say that their parents push them too hard academically, according to a recent national survey commissioned by *Family Circle*. Additionally, when kids see other kids cheating and not getting caught, it makes them question the importance of honesty. If the cheaters get better grades, an honest youth can feel frustrated.

## Consequences of Cheating

The consequences of cheating can be hard for a tween or teen to understand. Without the ability to see the long-term effects, children may feel that the pros of cheating (good grades) outweigh any negatives. That's why it's important for parents and teachers to explain the consequences of cheating, such as:

Cheating lowers your self-respect and confidence. And if others see you cheating, you will lose their respect and trust. Unfortunately, cheating is usually not a one-time thing. Once the threshold of cheating is crossed, youth may find it easier to continue cheating more often, or to be dishonest in other situations in life. Students who cheat lose an element of personal integrity that is difficult to recapture. It damages a child's self-image.

Students who cheat are wasting their time in school. Most learning builds on itself. A child must first learn one concept so that they are prepared for the next lesson. If they don't learn the basic concept, they have set themselves up to either continue failing or cheating. If you are caught, you could fail the course, be expelled, and gain a bad reputation with your teachers and peers. When you are hired by future employers based on the idea that you received good grades in a certain subject, you will not be able to solve problems, offer ideas, or maintain the workload in that subject area. A teen is only cheating themselves out of learning and discovering how good they could really do. Experts agree that students who repeatedly plagiarize Internet content lose their ability to think critically and to distinguish legitimate sources from those that are not. Students who cheat

in high school are more likely to do the same in college, and college cheaters, in turn, are more likely to behave dishonestly on the job.

### **Ways Schools Can Prevent Cheating**

Schools are trying to fight the cheating epidemic. Here are some ways they can be successful:

Set up an Internet firewall so students can't exchange e-mail and instant messages that might contain exam questions or answers. Require students to submit their papers to websites like TurnItIn.com. For about \$1 per pupil per year the company analyzes writing assignments for more than 5,000 middle and high schools, comparing a digital copy of a student's composition to a database of books, journals, the Internet and previously submitted papers. Students and teachers get instant feedback with suspect material highlighted. Of the 100,000 papers TurnItIn.com checks daily, about a third contain unoriginal, unsourced "cut-and-paste" content, from a few sentences to a paragraph or even more.

Create a school honor code that clearly spells out ethical behavior and defines academic misconduct. Establish specific penalties for those who plagiarize or cheat on exams, or those who fail to report classmates who do.

Complicating matters is that schools are sometimes reluctant to bring cheaters to justice for two main reasons. First, accusing a student usually results in very angry parents and sometimes lawsuits. Second, the federal government's No Child Left Behind policy penalizes schools whose students perform poorly on standardized tests by forcing them to close or replace staff.

### **Ways Parents Can Prevent Cheating**

Parents need to provide guidance and support to their teens to keep them from cheating. Education experts have this advice:

Talk to your kids about the importance of ethical behavior and how cheating will hurt them in the long term (use the consequences listed above). Point out negative examples when you see them and explain the problems those people will suffer. Be honest with yourself about whether you might be putting too much pressure on your children to succeed at school. Explain to your kids that ambition is fine, but honesty and integrity are more important than academic success achieved through deceit.

Be a good role model. If your child sees you cheat at board games or other small things, you are giving them the message that cheating is acceptable.

oooooooooooooooooooo

Check your computer history to see if your teens are using websites that sell written papers. If you see anything suspicious, talk to them about it. Stay involved in your teen's academic life. Review their homework and read your teens' essays to see how they are doing.

Ask school administrators to: develop an honor code. create ways for kids to identify cheaters anonymously so they don't fear retaliation from others. include lessons on proper paraphrasing and how to cite Internet sources. have teachers develop multiple versions of tests to deter students from sharing answers via text messaging.

### **Final thoughts...**

Schools and parents must both actively discourage cheating if we have any hope of stopping this epidemic. Studies show that America is lagging behind other countries in academics. Our nation will not be globally competitive if we raise a generation of undereducated cheaters. Parents and teachers should emphasize the importance of integrity.