

**EMBARGOED UNTIL October 15, 2006.**

**This release is scheduled to coincide with National CHARACTER COUNTS! Week, October 15-21. It is released early to permit time for analysis and interviews. Please do not publish before October 15.**

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## **2006 Josephson Institute Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth: Part One – Integrity Summary of Data**

### **Attitudes about Ethics, Character and Trust**

Young people are almost unanimous in saying that ethics and character are important on both a personal level and in business but they express very cynical attitudes about whether a person can be ethical and succeed.

- **Importance of Character and Trust.** Virtually all high school students (98%) said “It’s important for me to be a person with good character.” (Q1)
  - 98% believe that “honesty and trust are essential in personal relationships” (Q6).
  - 97% said “It’s important to me that people trust me.” (Q13).
  - 83% say “It’s not worth it to lie or cheat because it hurts your character.” (Q14).
- **Ethics in the Workplace.** Though their cynical attitudes about real world ethics has undoubtedly been influenced by highly publicized business scandals in the past few years, young people still believe ethics is important in the workplace: 94% said that “In business and the workplace, trust and honesty are essential.” (Q7).
- **Goodness More Important Than Wealth.** Eighty-nine percent (89%) agree that “Being a good person is more important than being rich” (though twice as many males *disagree* with this statement than females (11% v. 6%) (Q4).
- **Role Models.** Despite a growing concern that young people lack positive role models, 82% say that “most adults in my life consistently set a good example of ethics and character.” (Q2).

- Though one justification for the rampant cheating is the pressure put on youngsters by parents, the overwhelming majority (90%) say that their parents or guardians “always want me to do the right thing, no matter the cost” (Q3)
- Only 7% say that their parents “would rather they cheat than get bad grades” (Q12)

**Self-Appraisal.** Despite admissions of high levels of lying, cheating and theft, high school students maintain a high self image of their character and ethics both in relative and absolute terms.

- 92% say they are “*satisfied with my own ethics and character.*” (Q25)
- 84% expected that half or more of all the people who knew them would list them as one of the most ethical people they know (Q61).
- 74% say, “*When it comes to doing what is right, I am better than most people I know.*” (Q5)

### **Cynicism**

Despite consistently expressing positive and ideals-based attitudes about the importance of ethics and character and the role their parents and teachers play in encouraging them to do the right thing, a very high proportion of young people reveal corrosive cynical attitudes about what works and doesn't in the real world.

- 59% agreed that, “*In the real world, successful people do what they have to do to win, even if others consider it cheating*” (65% males, 54% females) (Q8)
- 42% believe that “*A person has to lie or cheat sometimes in order to succeed*” (50% males, 33% females). (Q9)
- More than one in five (23%) believe that “*People who are willing to lie, cheat or break the rules are more likely to succeed than people who do not*” (30% males, 16% females). (Q11).

### **Conduct**

Widespread and deep youth cynicism often reflects itself in a rationalization process that nullifies ethical judgment and condones conduct that is contrary to stated moral convictions. Thus, the same youngsters that speak of the importance of ethics, character and trust, frequently lie, cheat and even steal without much guilt or hesitation.

- 82% admit they **lied to parent** within the past 12 months **about something significant** – 57% said they lied two or more times. (Q41).
- 62% admit they **lied to teacher** within the past 12 months **about something significant** -- 35% said they lied two or more times. (Q42)..

- 33% ***copied an internet document*** within the past 12 months – 18% did so two or more times. (Q43).
- 60% ***cheated during a test at school*** within the past 12 months – 35% did so two or more times. (Q44).
- 23% ***stole something from a parent or other relative*** within the past 12 months – 11% did so two or more times (Q46). In 2002, 28% admitted stealing from a parent or other relative.
- 19% ***stole something from a friend*** within the past 12 months – 7% did so two or more times (Q47).
- 28% ***stole something from a store*** within the past 12 months – 14% did so two or more times (Q48).

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