

COLLEGE ETHICS SYMPOSIUM

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP CONDUCT

Ethical principles guide us in our responsibilities to ourselves, others, and to groups. As such they give us guidelines in directing our personal conduct daily. They are like a compass that keeps us on course in our striving to be responsible persons. The six ethical principles that follow are agreed upon virtues throughout our culture and have evolved over time from the wisdom of many different cultures. The commitment or obligation can be to an individual, a group, or a worthy cause.

1. Do good

Rule: Do good unto others. Our conduct toward others should contribute to their welfare or well-being. For our conduct to be considered good, it should produce some benefit. Sometimes the potential for good must be balanced against the risk of doing harm.

2. Do no harm.

Rule: Do no harm to others. Avoiding harm to another person requires careful consideration of one's actions and the possible consequences. Intentional harm is to be avoided. Whatever we do in words and actions is weighed for the possibility of hurting others.

3. Respect the person's right to be independent.

Rule: Respect others and their right to decide for themselves and to be left alone. Each person has rights that are to be respected by others. Freedom of speech, freedom of choice, and freedom of action are basic human rights as long as one does not violate the rights of others. This also includes the right to be left alone, one's right to privacy, and to have information about oneself remain private.

4. Be truthful.

Rule: Be truthful in all that you say and do. Honest communication and action are based upon what is correct, accurate, or done to the best of one's understanding. What is a fact and what is an opinion should be clear to the other party. There is an obligation to share what the other person has a right to know.

5. Keep your promises.

Rule: Be loyal and faithful in the promises you make to others. This principle involves faithfulness and promise-keeping. Whether the duty is to another person or to a group, the obligations and limits should be understood by the other party.

6. Be fair.

Be fair in your treatment of others. Fairness means being just in our dealings with others. One is guided by what is right, reasonable, impartial, and deserved. It is the basis for treating others as having equal rights and opportunities. When others have been denied equal rights and opportunities, an argument can be made for treating them differently to compensate for the unfairness. Treating others fairly is not dependent upon being treated fairly yourself.

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