

SO, CHEATING'S OK?

by Brian Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

Back in 2002 the Bush administration set a goal, according to The Associated Press, to reduce the incidence of cheating in schools from 40% to 35%. Student surveys had regularly found that around 40% of students declared that they had academically cheated and didn't believe there was anything wrong with that. My heart sank and I wondered where old-fashioned honor and ethics had gone. Obviously they had flown right out the window!

In an unnamed commentary in a local newspaper it stated that 'cultural deterioration is a harsh term. But what else fits when a Kansas school board won't stand behind a teacher who rejects plagiarized work? Or when 75% of the students in a Princeton University survey admitted that they had cheated or plagiarized in the previous year'.

Is our society saying that cheating is OK? A large proportion of people are saying exactly that. If they are not saying it they may be doing it themselves or sanctioning their children to cheat without comment or consequences. Did I ever cheat at school? Yes. I cannot 'cast the first stone', but I remember the very few instances where I cheated that my conscience worked overtime. I knew I had done wrong and I had little rest.

The last time I remember cheating was an incident at Teachers' College where we were able to do preparation at home for the test the following day. We were able to bring notes into the test, but I brought some finished product. When the professor graded the tests mine was too good to be true and he asked whether I had written all of this in class. I affirmed that I had with a red face. I felt so ashamed. Years later it was still in my conscience so I wrote to him, declared my guilt and asked for forgiveness.

In my dealings with students today I find a very scary phenomenon happening. Some kids appear not to have a conscience. They do not see any harm in cheating. Cyber cheating using cell phones is the latest cheating mechanism and students are very good at it. When the teacher is not looking they take a photo of the test and email it through to their friends in the next class. The friends have time to find the answers and come prepared to 'ace the test'.

The second form of cyber cheating is texting each other in the classroom during the test, asking their friend who may have studied for the test what the answer is to a particular question. Kids are very adept at texting without looking and they have cleverly worked out their cheating mechanisms. Cheating is wrong whatever way we look at it, but the difference between when you went through school and now is the belief that it is OK and there is no guilt to suffer.

When our kids see in the news politicians being sentenced on ethical issues, corporate CEO's being jailed for fraud and embezzlement it probably reinforces their belief that if you can get away with it, then it is cool. Just don't get caught! If we cheat on our taxes, on our spouse, or do our child's homework for them we are sending a very strong message to them that it is acceptable.

What is the solution to this cheating epidemic? It starts right at the feet of us parents. It involves training our children from their earliest days that honesty, integrity and ethics are an essential part of living an honorable life and developing strong character. It's what God expects without question and definitely what we should expect from our children. Developing a conscience in our children is reinforcing what the Lord has planted in them already. It is our duty as parents to ensure our children walk a principled life and to apply consequences when they fail to do that.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.