

## The ten most important things to know about research ethics

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1. Be honest.
2. Be fair.
3. Do good science.
4. Know and follow the rules (conventions, policies, regulations, laws) relevant to your lab, department, university, and field of study.
5. If you don't like or agree with a rule, don't break it – change it. Trying to change it may convince you that it's actually a good rule. Or you might succeed in changing it.
6. When in doubt, ask questions.<sup>2</sup>
7. If you ever think, “I can get away with this because no one will ever know the difference and no one will ever find out” – *stop*. This is a red flag. You are almost certainly contemplating doing something unethical.
8. If you ever think, “I know it's wrong, but I've got to do it; I don't have any choice” – *stop*. Before you act, ask yourself what will happen if you don't do it. Does the world come to an end? Do you die? Probably not. Then imagine that the unethical act you are tempted to do is impossible, for whatever reason, and think of three other actions you can take. One of them is bound to be ethical. It might not be as easy as the unethical course of action, but once you've identified it you can find the courage to follow through on it.<sup>3</sup>
9. If you ever see someone acting in a way that you think is unethical, don't jump to conclusions. Treat it as a scientific question – gather data, observe carefully, and keep notes. Gathering data might include asking the person to clarify what's going on. You do have a responsibility to report misconduct, but you also have a responsibility (to yourself and to the person you suspect) to have a clear idea of what's really going on.<sup>4</sup>
10. If you ever feel trapped, if you ever feel like there's no one who can help you – *stop*. You're wrong. You are *not* in this alone. You need to take a deep breath and put things into perspective.

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<sup>2</sup> Most universities have a designated Research Integrity Officer (RIO), who is usually located in the office of the Vice President for Research, the Provost, or the Chancellor. It should always be safe to get in touch with the RIO.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from a statement by Bill Moyer's interviewee, *Michael Josephson* (videorecording, Alexandria, VA: PBS Video, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> Point 9 is about an activity usually called “whistle blowing.” For much more complete advice, see: C. K. Gunasius, “How to blow the whistle and still have a career afterwards,” *Science and Engineering Ethics* 4(1998):51-64, also available via the World Wide Web at <http://poynter.indiana.edu/links.html#SEE>.