

### Scenario #3

Brendan was in third grade when he was caught cheating on his math quiz. He had been doing poorly in math and his parents had threatened that if he didn't raise his grades they wouldn't let him play on the baseball team. So he cheated. When the teacher asked him about it, he denied it at first, but finally admitted to writing down the answers ahead of time.

A parent conference was called and Brendan had to sit with his parents, the teacher, and the principal to discuss the school policy on cheating and lying. On the way home, his father told Brendan he was deeply disappointed in him and expected more from him in the future. That night, Brendan felt like the whole world was against him, but he also felt guilty for letting his parents down.

That weekend, Brendan and his family went to a movie. When they got to the ticket window Brendan's dad asked for children's tickets for both Brendan and his 16 year old brother. Brendan looked over at his brother, who stared down at the sidewalk and hunched his shoulders hoping the ticket seller wouldn't notice that he was well above the age for a child's ticket. The ticket seller glanced suspiciously back and forth between the father and the brother, and then, with a doubtful look on her face, she handed them the the two child's tickets. This happened every time they went to the movies, and it always made Brendan feel weird.

On the way home from the movie, Brendan asked his father why it was okay to lie and cheat the theater out of money but not to cheat on his math quiz. His dad responded that sometimes its okay to lie as long as nobody gets hurt.

The rest of the way home Brendan just got more and more confused. Cheating on his test hurt nobody. He didn't steal the answers from any of the other students. If he hadn't gotten caught, he would have been praised. How was what he did different from what his dad did over and over again? And should he continue to stay silent the next time his dad lied?

### NOTES FOR THE FACILITATOR

(this is for you)

Notice how this case only mentions that the school talked about the "policy" and the father talked about "expecting more." Nobody helped Brendan understand how cheating wouldn't serve him in the long run—that in essence HE was hurt by cheating. This case is a good example of how many children feel when they are called on for misbehaving. What may seem apparent to the adults is not clear to the child.

This case also brings to light the obvious hypocrisies that kids notice and take in every day when they are listening to adults and watching their behavior at the same time. The disconnect is very clear to them and it muddles and confuses the lessons that they are supposed to be learning from the adult world. How are they to come to terms with developing their own sense of ethics when they are often powerless to question the ways in which the world seems to contradict the ethics they are forming? Also, we need to validate feelings of anger and confusion when the important role models in their lives contradict the ethics they are teaching. It is very confusing, and if kids are confused and think the stuff doesn't make sense, they are right on the mark. Finally, how do we create safe places for kids to question the world around them while on their journey to forming good character?

And what advice do we as educators give when students point out these contradictions in their families and ask for advice?

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(also, debate topics, writing assignments, etc.)

- What is Brendan's dilemma?
- Have you ever seen an adult or friend do something you felt wasn't right? What did you do? How did it make you feel?
- Do you think Brendan should try to talk to his Dad again about his lying at the movies?
- Who might Brendan have hurt by cheating on his quiz?
- Brendan's Dad said it was okay to be dishonest if no one was hurt. Who do you think might have been hurt by his lying at the movie ticket office?
- Have you ever felt like doing (or have you actually done) the "wrong thing" because you felt like it was worth it? Do you still feel that it was worth it?