



Cheating Disguised

By Sasha Clayton

I was fascinated by a recent article in the San Francisco Chronicle (9/9/07). It was entitled "Academic Cheating is at an All-time High." When we think of cheating, we think of the child who steals test questions and sells or gives them to another, or we think of the student who buys papers online and passes them off as his own work. However, there were warning flags in this article that I felt important to pass along to you, as parents of high-achieving, kind-hearted children.

Certainly, the influx of texting on cell phones has increased cheating, especially in high schools. With technology at the fingertips of our youth, cheating is easier to do and easier to get away with. With websites like sparknotes.com, cliffnotes.com, and Wikipedia, it is very easy to access and plagiarize information. *By the way, in case you are not aware, Wikipedia is a site where anyone can add any information, whether accurate or not. It is not checked for veracity and should not be a resource for students unless verified by another source.* There are a host of other sites that students use every day to aid in cheating (especially through plagiarism). Luckily, there is also a priceless school resource, turnitin.com, which allows teachers to identify plagiarized material with the click of a button.

But how does this relate to you now? Even at a young age, our students are exposed to the temptation of cheating. Often, students do not classify their own actions as cheating. For example, I recently spoke to a Hilldale student about not "helping" her peer with her homework by providing answers. I explained that, although it was kind of her to explain things, the student really needs to get help from the teacher so that she can have the material explained to her (accurately). The very next day, I saw the same well-intentioned student showing her answers to another friend in class. I explained that if the other child doesn't seek help from the teacher, she will not learn the material. I told her that, by showing her the answers, she was cheating. She was shocked. "I was just helping her!" I told her that I understood her intentions, but showing her the answers hurts them both. The other child doesn't learn the material, and they both get in trouble for cheating.

In another situation, I encountered some older students working together to complete their homework during homework club. I asked them whether they were assigned the material as a group or individually. They got quiet very quickly. "We were just working on it together," one student interjected. I explained that individual assignments allow the teacher to assess how well they understand the material. If students are getting answers from their friends without doing the work themselves, the teacher won't know which students need help. They reluctantly agreed to work individually.

The article went on to say that the pressure on students to succeed in high schools and colleges is increasing exponentially. We have to be aware that our students will be exposed to this kind of pressure, as they will likely be among the brightest of their peers in the high school they choose to attend. Admittance to colleges is getting more demanding; schools are requiring top grades and test scores, high class rankings, and a host of extra-curricular activities. In many high schools, the pressure is inciting bright students, who could do very well on assignments and exams, to cheat in order to ensure that they will stay on top.

We need to get the message out to our students that it is better to do well and keep their integrity and self respect than to be the best through cheating. It is imperative that we teach these young people how to identify cheating behavior in themselves and others so that they can change this behavior early and learn positive habits. Our students have pressures ahead that we cannot ignore. Giving them the tools now may save a great deal of trouble later. After all, students who learn to cheat, become adults who cheat. It is my hope that, through our Self-Awareness classes, Ethics curriculum, and our reactions to their behaviors (whether well-intentioned or not), we can help curb this cheating phenomenon — sooner rather than later.