ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR THE TEACHING OF PSYCHOLOGY IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS[1]

These guidelines were developed by the American Psychological Association (APA) to assist high school psychology teachers in safeguarding the rights and welfare of students and experimental subjects while promoting high-quality instruction in psychology. The guidelines pertain to student experimentation and demonstration with humans, student experimentation and demonstration with animals, and ethical issues faced by the high school psychology teacher.

Guidelines for the Use of Human Participants in Research or Demonstrations Conducted by High School Students

Learning how guidelines have come about and are used is, in itself, perhaps one of the most important outcomes of students' association with research on human participants. Currently there is much social concern about how scientists should handle situations in which the possibility of generating important information may also involve the risk of harm to human participants. While high school students should not do research that might involve unpleasant outcomes for the human participants involved, they should understand that professional researchers must often engage in some difficult problem solving before they discover a way to conduct research ethically.

There has long been moral concern about research on humans. Until the last two centuries, any kind of research on humans, or even on human cadavers, was considered sinful, since the human spirit and soul were thought to reside in the body. With the rise of science, experimentation on humans began: biomedical research dates from the 1700's and psychological research began within the 19th [this] century. At the end of World War II, it was learned that Nazi scientists had used prisoners in medical research without regard for their lives. The famous Nuremberg Trials of Nazi war criminals investigated these atrocities committed in the name of science. From this sprung the Nuremberg Code of Research on Humans, which emphasized that scientists must have the informed consent of any human participants in research.

Another [The next] significant step in examining research ethics occurred during the 1970's, when the U.S. Congress appointed a National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects in Biomedical and Behavioral Research. This group did much to clarify the basic ethical principles of human research and to offer specific guidelines for ethical decision making by researchers. The National Commission held that the following three ethical principles should guide research on humans: [delete: The next]

A. Beneficence – maximizing good outcomes and avoiding unnecessary risk.

B. Respect – concern for autonomy of persons and courtesy.

C. Justice – fair procedures, fair distribution of costs and benefits.

These three basic principles translate into six norms of scientific behavior (the letters in parentheses designate the principles on which each norm is based):

1. **Valid research design.** [Only valid research yields correct results.] Valid design takes account of relevant theory, methods and prior findings. In the absence of a valid design, the subject's time is not used appropriately. (A,B)

2. **Competence of researcher.** Even well-designed research may yield invalid results or cause harm if the researcher is inadequately supervised or insufficiently qualified. (A,B)

3. **Identification of consequences.** Possible risks and benefits should be identified and considered before the research is conducted. (A,B,C)

4. **Selection of subjects.** The population sampled should: (a) be appropriate to the purposes of the study, (b) whenever possible, be the one that benefits from the research, and (c) [not] include persons having very limited power and autonomy only when their well-being can be appropriately safe-guarded, and then only with appropriate informed consent. (A,B,C)

5. **Voluntary informed consent.** Voluntary informed consent of subjects should be obtained beforehand. **Voluntary** means freely, without threat or undue inducement. **Informed** means that the subject knows what a reasonable person in that situation would want to know before giving consent. **Consent** means explicit agreement to participate. Informed consent requires clear communication which subjects comprehend, not complex technical explanations or legal jargon. (A,B,C) Research involving minors requires the consent of legal guardians.

6. **Compensation for injury.** The researcher is responsible for what happens to subjects, and should compensate them for injury. (A,B,C)

In addition to these basic principles and norms of research, high school students planning to use human participants in research or demonstrations are strongly urged to become thoroughly acquainted with the American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles in the Conduct of Research with Human Participants[2]. This book contains many useful illustrations of what the ethical principles mean in the context of actual research. The potential problems of research on humans typically are not immediately evident to scientists or to students doing research for the first time. Consideration of the material contained in Ethical Principles in the Conduct of Research with Human Participants, coupled with close teacher supervision are essential.

The following are specific guidelines for the use of human participants in research or demonstrations conducted by high school students.

1. All research and demonstrations involving human participants should be closely supervised by a qualified adult. The supervisor should assume the primary responsibility for all conditions for the experiment. The following requirements should be fulfilled:

   a. The supervisor should be familiar with the relevant literature concerning previous work done in the student's chosen area. When

possible, the student should also review and summarize pertinent scientific literature.

b. A written preliminary outline of the student's plan of study, to include a statement of the purpose and procedures and justification of the chosen methods. It should also contain a copy of the informed consent statement that will be provided to subjects. This outline should be submitted and be available for evaluation by relevant school authorities. Such an outline should include the general and specific purposes of the research or demonstration and a justification of the methods to be employed.

2. Participants must not be exposed to physical or mental risk. High school students should not undertake procedures involving human participants that are likely to harm or stress the participants. Participants should not be subjected to any risks greater than the ordinary risks of daily life in school. Research supervisors are responsible for the conduct of all student researchers. To assure compliance with [this] these guidelines, high schools are encouraged to form student-faculty committees that examine all research or demonstration proposals from the point of view of APA's Ethical Principles in the Conduct of Research with Human Participants, to assure that risks do not exceed the ordinary risks of daily life. Such committees might be constituted at the classroom level, across classes, at the department level, or schoolwide.

3. Agreement to participate should be obtained from all participants and, in the case of minors, from a parent or legal guardian. The individual conducting the project should develop an informed consent statement containing those elements required by federal law. Federal law governing human research requires that informed consent statements contain the following:

a. Explain the purpose of the research, the expected duration of the subject's participation, and a description of the procedures. Describe the procedure in terms the subject understands. Avoid jargon or explanations that are irrelevant to deciding whether to participate.
b. Describe any foreseeable risks or discomforts to the subject.
c. Describe any benefits reasonably to be expected from participation.
d. Describe alternatives to participation, where appropriate.
e. Describe how confidentiality will be maintained.
f. [For risky research, say whether compensation for harm is available.] Although students should not be conducting research that is risky to the subjects, they should indicate what steps are being taken to safeguard the subjects, or what steps will be taken to detect or remediate harmful effects.
g. Indicate whom to contact for answers to questions about the research, subjects' rights, or in case of a research-related injury.
h. Indicate that participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled, and the subject may discontinue participation at any time.
i. Indicate that there will be an opportunity for debriefing following participation in the research.

The consent statement should be written in clear, friendly language so that it will be easily understood.

4. Participants have the right to refuse to participate. Potential participants may refuse to participate and may withdraw from participation at any time during the course of the research or demonstration procedures. The person conducting the project should also provide opportunity for withdrawal with minimum discomfort during participation, particularly if a group activity is involved. One should be especially careful when the person conducting the project is in a position of influence over participants. For example, students in lower grades should not be pressured into participating in an experiment by an upper-class[man] student and should not be publicly identified if they decline to participate in a particular experiment, survey, or demonstration. Under no circumstances should potential participants be exposed to ridicule, force, or excessive group pressure.

5. The student must be prepared to deal with the possible undesirable consequences for participants. The supervisor should discuss with the student possible undesirable consequences of the project that should result in at least a temporary halt in the project. In the event that unanticipated undesirable consequences are detected by the individual conducting the project, he or she should halt the project if it is still in progress and notify the supervisor or other appropriate school authorities.

6. The anonymity of the information gathered should be preserved. In most research, the aim is to learn principles of human behavior, not to learn specific information about any identified individual. For this reason, and to protect the privacy of those who participate in the research, data are gathered anonymously whenever feasible. Sometimes, if data are to be gathered on the same sample at different occasions, and then compared across time, it is handy to use names. However, as soon as the data are collected and assembled, the names should be removed.

7. After the data are collected, the participant should be provided with information about the nature of the study, which may include the full information about the problem under study, the broader significance of the research, the ways in which the research may contribute to the solution of the problem, and the value of the role played by the participant in this process. Attempts should be made to correct any misperceptions on the part of participants.

Only with the participant's full agreement may the person conducting the project disclose identifiable information about that participant to any other person. A plan for protecting the anonymity of the information gathered should be a part of the information that is presented when getting initial agreement (informed consent) of the potential participants. The persons conducting the project should make every effort to maintain anonymity. Participants should be made aware that in some cases it may be difficult or impossible to maintain full anonymity about all of the information obtained.

Guidelines for the Use of Animals In School Behavioral Science Projects

The primary objective of using live animals in classroom or science fair projects is educational, to demonstrate previously established phenomena, rather than to obtain new information. For this reason, and also because the resources available in schools are rarely comparable to those of an established research facility, these Guidelines are considerably more restrictive than those intended for research settings. Intermediate and secondary school students planning to use live animals in classroom or science fair projects should familiarize themselves with the APA Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in the Care and Use of Animals (1986) (see Footnote 2), but should take particular note of the stipulation that procedures involving live animals which may be justified by the promise of acquiring new information are not always justified for pure educational purposes.

These Guidelines do not apply to supervised student work in research laboratories, which comes under the provisions of the APA Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in the Care and Use of Animals.

1. School projects involving animals should be designed to teach correct and humane procedures, and also to introduce students to ethical issues in animal care and animal research.

2. Projects involving the use of animals should be undertaken by students only on a voluntary basis. Alternative projects should be [provided for] undertaken by students who prefer not to work with animals.

3. All projects involving animals must be preplanned, and conducted in accordance with these Guidelines. Projects intended for science fair exhibition must also comply with any requirements of the sponsor.

4. Projects should involve only animals which are easy to maintain and for which an adequate and appropriate living environment can be provided throughout the conduct of the project.

5. Vertebrate animals should be used only when the aim of the project cannot be achieved with the use of invertebrate animals.

6. The basic daily needs of each animal shall be of prime concern. Students must ensure the proper housing, feeding, watering, exercise, cleanliness, and gentle handling of their animals. Appropriate arrangements must be made for care during weekends, holidays and vacations. Students must protect their animals from sources of disturbance or harm, including teasing by other students.

7. Students shall not inflict pain, severe deprivation or undue stress on animals. They shall also not use invasive procedures, such as surgery, the administration of drugs, ionizing radiation, or potentially toxic agents as part of a school project. Such procedures are justified only as part of an approved research protocol carried out in a research facility.

8. Each student undertaking a school science project involving animals must be knowledgeable about relevant previous work in the area of study.

9. Each student undertaking a school science project involving animals must have a qualified supervisor. A qualified supervisor shall be a person who has had training and experience in the proper care of the species and in the techniques to be used in the project. The supervisor assumes the primary responsibility for all conditions of the project, and must ensure that the student is adequately trained in the care and handling of the animals, as well as in the methods to be used.

10. The supervisor shall be familiar with the relevant literature concerning previous work done in the student's chosen area. Failing this, a statement of the specific purpose, plan of action, justification of the methodology, and anticipated outcome for each behavioral science project involving animals shall be submitted for approval to a scientist holding an advanced degree in the specific discipline under study.

11. Upon completion of a project, the supervisor is responsible for the proper disposition of each animal. Whenever feasible, means of disposal should be found which permit continuation of the animal's life, provided that the animal continues to be housed and handled in accordance with APA guidelines and government regulations. If it is appropriate that the animal's life be terminated, euthanasia must be carried out painlessly, in accordance with American Veterinary Medicine Association guidelines. Under no circumstances may students experiment with such procedures.

12. Students, teachers, and supervisors must be cognizant of, and adhere to, current federal, state and local laws and regulations pertaining to the care and handling of animals. A recommended reference is the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 10402, Stock #017-040-00427-3.

13. Teachers and students are encouraged to consult with the APA Committee on Animal Research and Ethics for advice on adherence to these Guidelines.

14. A copy of these Guidelines shall be posted conspicuously wherever animals used in school projects are housed and wherever such projects are carried out, including at science fairs.

Ethical Guidelines for High School Psychology Teachers

It is generally recognized that teaching psychology in the high school is a challenging task, and that experiments, demonstrations, discussions, and other activities can be a valuable part of a psychology course. Complex ethical issues may be involved in experiments with human participants, experiments with animal sub$cts, self-disclosure in class discussions or activities, and questioning of personal or social values. This document presents some guidelines for high school psychology teachers. Most of the guidelines are adapted from the American Psychological Association and National Education Association codes of ethics.

1. Moral, ethical, and legal standards of behavior for any psychology teacher are a personal matter to the same degree as they are for any other citizen, except as these may compromise the fulfillment of their professional responsibilities, or reduce the trust in teaching of psychology

held by the general public. In addition, teachers can influence others, and therefore, also should be aware of the possible impact of the public and ethical behavior that they exhibit in the presence of those whom they influence.

2. To the extent that high school psychology teachers have not had the training and experience of professional psychologists specializing in psychological testing, diagnosis, therapy, or research, they should avoid representing themselves to students, parents, or colleagues as psychologists or as experts in these areas. The ethics of teaching psychology require high school teachers constantly to strive for objectivity, to search for truth, and to distinguish between scientific principles and generalizations on the one hand, and personal opinions on the other.

3. In planning a course, high school psychology teachers should evaluate the ethical acceptability of all aspects of the course, taking these guidelines into account. If the appraisal suggests a deviation from any guideline, teachers should seek advice from the APA Committee on Psychology in the Secondary Schools, the Committee for the Protection of Human Participants in Research, or the APA Committee on Animal Research and Ethics.

4. High school psychology teachers are responsible for the establishment and maintenance of acceptable ethical practice in a course. They are also responsible for the ethical behavior of co-teachers, student teachers, aides, and students involved in the course. These others, however, incur parallel ethical obligations. Department heads, principals, and other administrators, school boards, and parents are also responsible for ethical practices in schools.

5. A significant part of a high school psychology course should be consideration of the ethical aspects of human and animal experimentation. High school psychology teachers should raise questions about the ethics of research and treatment methods, applications of research results, and research or demonstrations performed by or on students. They should attempt to provide a balanced and considered discussion of the use of animals in research[3]. It should be made clear that many ethical questions have no simple answers and that thoughtful, well-informed, and well-intentioned individuals often reach different conclusions on ethical issues. Students should be encouraged to exercise ethical judgment and take stands on the ethics of actions that involve them; teachers should respect these stands, especially when the opinions differ from their own.

6. The study of psychology includes value-laden areas of human behavior. At the beginning of a course and throughout it, high school psychology teachers should emphasize that viewpoints on sensitive topics will be presented in addition to those that individual students already hold. Indeed, teachers have a responsibility to help students distinguish among the facts, fancies, and values. Teachers should not avoid controversial issues simply because students hold opinions contrary to well-accepted scientific generalizations.

7. High school psychology teachers should protect students from undue psychological discomfort, harm, and danger in a course; students should not

be subjected to any risks greater than the ordinary risks of daily life. Procedures that involve a significant possibility of harm to human or animal participants should not be used. Experiments, discussions, demonstrations, and activities involving personally sensitive topics such as drug use or sexuality may produce undesirable effects. The high school psychology teacher should be aware of the diverse backgrounds of the students, and, when dealing with sensitive topics, treat the material objectively and present it in a manner that takes feelings into account. Teachers should explore alternative possibilities of reaching their intended educational objective and should seek advice on the ethical acceptability of any questionable activities. Students should not be permitted to employ procedures with human participants in areas in which their high school psychology teacher is not adequately trained to offer appropriate supervision. High school teachers of psychology are encouraged to seek the advice and supervision of a qualified scientist in these instances. In all cases, high school psychology teachers should be guided by APA's Ethical Principles of Psychologists (see Footnote 2), Ethical Principles in the Conduct of Research with Human Participants, and the Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in the Care and Use of Animals.

8. The quality of relationships between students and the significant persons and social systems in their lives (e.g., family, school, church, and community) should not be placed unduly and unnecessarily at risk. High school psychology teachers should be sensitive to the possibility that some experiments, demonstrations, discussions, or other activities may involve significant risk to those relationships. For example, relationships could be damaged by the use of deception, including inaccurate or incomplete disclosure of information. On the other hand, even though a unit on the psychology of prejudice might create family problems for a child with a racially bigoted parent, the topic should not be avoided on such grounds alone.

9. Teachers have a responsibility to avoid dual relationships with their students. They should recognize and honor the distinction between teaching and offering counseling. Teachers should not engage in any relationships that are potentially exploitative. As in the teaching of any subjects in schools, sexual relationships are prohibited.

[9.] 10. Before undertaking an experiment, demonstration, discussion, or other activity, high school psychology teachers should attempt to anticipate undesirable consequences and take precautions to prevent them. In the event that an activity results in unanticipated undesirable consequences for a student or other participant, teachers should be sensitive to and make efforts to correct these consequences, including long-term after-effects, where relevant. When the needs of a student require it, teachers should refer the student to an appropriate professional such as the school psychologist or guidance counselor.

[10.] 11. Certain events should lead to the discontinuation of an experiment, demonstration, discussion or other activity. If high school psychology teachers become aware that undue physical or psychological discomfort, harm, or danger to a participant is occurring, or if a participant feels harmed by an activity or challenges its ethical acceptability, teachers should halt the activity immediately and take steps to relieve any harm or to correct any misunderstanding that has occurred.

The activity should be resumed or repeated only if there is good reason to believe that the conditions that resulted in the earlier problem no longer exist. Teachers are urged to seek advice from the participants, as well as from colleagues or experts, before resuming or repeating the activity.

[11.] 12. Students should be free to decline to participate, or to discontinue participation in an experiment, demonstration, discussion, or other activity that might involve undue and severe risk to them, or which is ethically unacceptable to them. Providing alternative means of fulfilling course requirements is one way of satisfying this guideline. Where possible, students who decline to participate in an activity should not be publicly identified, nor should they be exposed to group pressure or ridicule.

[12.] 13. Allowing students meaningful freedom to decline to participate in an experiment, demonstration, discussion or other activity implies that high school psychology teachers have informed students of the features of the activity that might reasonable be expected to influence their decision to participate. It also implies that teachers have answered any questions students may have about the activity. Considerations of class time or educational impact may sometimes prompt teachers not to inform students fully about an activity in advance; if the planned activity is new (without a history of success and safety in similar situations), teachers should seek advice on its ethical acceptability from colleagues and/or students.

[13.] 14. At the end of a class session involving an experiment or demonstration using student participants, high school psychology teachers should provide the participants (and any observers) with a debriefing that includes a discussion of students' reactions to the activity. A debriefing that fully clarifies the nature of the activity should take place at the end of each experiment or demonstration.

[14.] 15. High school psychology teachers cannot promise legal confidentiality to students, nor can students promise it to one another. Before an experiment, demonstration, discussion, or other activity, potential participants should be informed whether information that is obtained about or disclosed by them will be anonymous. Information that cannot or will not be anonymous should be kept private to the extent consistent with student learning. Circumstances under which such information might be disclosed to others, especially persons outside the psychology class, should be the subject of a clear agreement arrived at in advance by the students and the teacher.

[15.] 16. In situations where there might be a conflict between a high school psychology teacher's personal interests and the students' interests – for example, when a teacher is conducting research for outside credit or publication and using the students as subjects — teachers are under special obligation to seek advice on the ethical acceptability of planned activities.

[16.] 17. In student experiments or demonstrations using animals as subjects, high school psychology teachers should ensure that students follow APA's Guidelines for the Use of Animals in School Behavioral Science Projects and that the care of the animals is in conformity with all

applicable governmental and institutional laws and regulations. In general, animals used in school experiments or demonstrations should be invertebrates rather than vertebrates, and naturalistic observation of vertebrates is preferable to experimentation on them. Invasive procedures, electric shock, and high stress should be avoided.

[17.] 18. In student experiments or demonstrations using human participants, high school psychology teachers should ensure that students follow APA's Guidelines for the Use of Human Participants in Research. In general, students should obtain agreement to participate from all participants, deal with possible undesirable consequences for participants, and preserve the anonymity of the information gathered. They should not use procedures that expose participants to undue physical or psychological risk. Further, the statements in Guideline #7 on experiments or demonstrations conducted by teachers also apply to experiments or demonstrations conducted by students.

Footnotes

[1]These guidelines were approved by the Committee for the Protection of Human Participants in Research, the Committee on Animal Research and Experimentation, the Committee on Psychology in the Secondary Schools, the Board of Scientific Affairs, the Interim Board of Educational Affairs, the Board of Directors, and the Council of Representatives of the American Psychological Association.

[2]This publication is available from the APA Order Department, P.O. Box 2710, Hyattsville, MD 20784

[3]Brochures reflecting APA policy and the history of animal research are available from the APA Committee on Animal Research and Ethics