**SITUATION #1**

Jennifer is a transfer student in her sophomore year in high school. By November, she had made some good friends through her soccer team and her classes, but still felt on the outside of the more popular students. She has a great relationship with her parents, and trusts their advice to just give it time.

The first weekend of Thanksgiving break, rumors started that a blow out party was happening at a sophomore girl’s house while the parents were out of town. Jennifer didn’t know the girl well but she was one of the most popular girls in the class and most of the upperclassmen were planning on attending, as well. One of the hottest junior guys had already asked her if she would be there. Everyone was saying this was going to be the best party of the year. This seemed like the perfect opportunity to break out of her small clique and hang out with the students everyone always talked about.

Her dilemma was that there was no way her parents would let her go to this party if they knew the parents were out of town, and she wanted to go very badly. Jennifer had rarely lied to her parents and never about anything big. She knew her parents trusted her and that made it even harder to lie to them. Because they respected her, she hated the times when she felt like she was letting them down.

Her friends told her to just not say anything and only lie if her parents directly asked her about adults being at the party. Easy enough for them to say, but her friends weren’t as tight with their parents as she was with hers. She felt that if she just went to this one party her social standing at school could be a lot different. She would get to know more students, she’d be seen as someone they can party with, and she wouldn’t be so shy about approaching the more popular students anymore.

Would it be worth it to hide the facts of the party from her parents and risk having to lie? And if they found out about the party, could she deal with the fact that they probably wouldn’t trust her anymore? On the other hand, everyone lies to his or her parents eventually. And if they never found out, what would it really matter?

**DISCUSSION STARTERS:**

* What do you think about Jennifer’s situation? Do you empathize with her? How does being new possibly affect her dilemma?
* What would you do?
* What do you think your parents would do if you told them about the party?
* Have you or someone you know ever been in a similar situation? What happened?
* What do you do when you are faced with a situation where there doesn’t seem to be a “good choice”?
* Who do you have in your life (besides your parents) that you might go to if you were faced with this dilemma?

**SITUATION #2**

Kevin is a talented basketball player whose high school team made it into the playoffs and all the way to the city championship game. As a result, Kevin had to miss his school’s baseball tryouts and a couple of weeks of practice. So, he was grateful when the coach gave him an opportunity to come out for the team anyway. Kevin’s older brother had been on the varsity team for four years, so the coach knew the family and assumed Kevin would follow in his brother’s footsteps. But Kevin had never played league baseball before and had no expectation of getting a lot of playing time. Besides, the team already had a solid lineup of experienced players; he would just have to be patient and earn his position through hard work.

Which is why Kevin was shocked when the coach announced the starting lineup for the first game: Kevin was picked to start at third base.

Kevin immediately felt confused, then embarrassed, then guilty. He was confused because the coach had never seen him play. He felt embarrassed and guilty because everyone knew that the coach must have made this decision based on Kevin’s athletic reputation and the coach’s relationship with Kevin’s older brother. Kevin considered himself a team player. He also knew the other third baseman—a strong player who never missed a practice. Surely the other guy deserved to be the starter. He looked around at his teammates and saw himself through their eyes. He felt bad. He walked to his position without making eye contact with the coach or the players.

After the game, Kevin called his brother and said he was thinking about asking the coach to let him step down until he had earned the position in a way that was fair to the rest of the team. His brother said no way. Life is about seizing opportunity. That’s how you achieve your dreams. Why give up your big chance? “Besides,” he said, “I put in a good word for you, so don’t blow it.”

Kevin felt like he was stuck. If he kept silent, he risked the respect of his team; if he came forward, he risked the athletic opportunity and his relationship with his coach. He needed to make a decision before the next game.

**DISCUSSION STARTERS:**

* What do you think Kevin should do? What do you think you would do?
* How do you think the team might feel about the coach letting Kevin start without having seen him play or participate in the first two weeks of practice?
* What do you think is the coach’s reason for making Kevin a starting player? Do you agree with it?
* How do you feel about the role Kevin’s brother is playing in all this?
* How might Kevin feel if he doesn’t talk to the coach?
* How much influence do you think Kevin’s brother has on Kevin’s choice?
* If you were faced with an ethical dilemma, how important would your sibling’s opinion be?
* Have you ever seen someone you know benefit from an unfair situation? What happened? What did it feel like? How did the person benefiting respond? If you didn’t agree with that response, how do you wish he/she would have responded?
* Have you ever benefited from an unfair situation? What happened and how did you respond? Would you respond in the same way again?

**SITUATION #3**

“Omigod. That is so retarded!”

Katy cringed. She hated that word. She knew it was meant as a joke but it wasn’t a joke to her because it made fun of people who had done nothing to deserve it and have no choice. She thought about how many times a day she heard that word. And that wasn’t the only word that made her cringe these days. If she heard the word “gay” one more time used to mean someone was stupid or weird she was going to scream. Ever since her fifth grade social studies teacher spent a lesson on language and how words shape how we see the world, she started seeing examples everywhere that proved him right. But now that she realized all this, what was she supposed to do?

The following week, Katy was in the cafeteria when she heard a friend at her table complain that the science teacher was making him stay after school to take a test. “And I even told him I would miss basketball practice. Mr. Swenson is such a retard.”

“Can you stop saying that word, Matt? It’s not fair.” Katy froze. She couldn’t believe she had just spoken. The words came out without thinking first. Everyone stopped and looked at her.

“What is your problem?” Matt asked. Katy felt her face get hot.

“Yeah, Katy, it’s just a joke. Lighten up,” someone else said as others nodded in agreement. “Everyone says it.”

The conversation moved forward, but Katy’s face stayed hot and she felt alone and ganged up on. She didn’t want other people to make fun of her, but she also felt like if she didn’t speak up about this sort of thing she would also feel bad. Even if using words like “retarded” and “gay” didn’t make things worse in the world, it surely wouldn’t make things better.

Katy felt weird by speaking up. And she felt weird by staying silent. Why did all this seem so clear to her social studies teacher and not to her? And most importantly, what should she do?

**DISCUSSION STARTERS:**

* What’s the big deal here? Is Katy making too much out of nothing?
* What do you think the lesson Katy heard in social studies about language sounded like?
* What do think makes Katy uncomfortable about speaking up when she hears words that offend her?
* Have you ever felt uncomfortable when you’ve heard one of these words used?
* Have you ever used one of these words? Have you thought about how using it might hurt the feelings of others?
* Can you think of a time when you or someone you know corrected another person after he or she used a word that like “retarded” or “gay”? What happened? Is it something you or they might do again, do you think?
* How do you think Katy might be making a difference simply by asking that people not use language that might insult or hurt someone’s feelings?
* How do little actions to make things right affect bigger actions? Can a small act of good make a bigger difference? How?

**SITUATION #4**

Erin knew something was weird when her parents greeted her after school by saying, “Nice report card, Honey! We knew you could do it!” She put her backpack down and picked up the report card from the kitchen table. English: A, Math: A-, World Civilization: B+, Chemistry: A-. Erin looked again. And again.

The chemistry grade was wrong, there was no doubt about it. Erin thought back to last week. She went into the final exam with an A-, but she received a C- on the exam. She had been devastated. So much so, that she didn’t say anything about it to her parents.

So, what happened? Her teacher must have either miscalculated Erin’s grade, or hit a wrong key when he was entering the grades. The science final was worth forty percent of her grade. That would make her chemistry grade a B-. The real question was, “Now what?”

For better or worse, today was the first day of semester break. Erin had a week before she would see her teacher again. She had a week to figure out if she should tell the teacher about the mistake. She called her best friend.

“Why should you say anything?” was her friend’s response. “It was the teacher’s mistake, not yours. That grade could decide whether or not you get into the college you want.” Erin could see her friend’s point of view but something didn’t sit well with her. Could she live with the idea of always knowing that grade was a lie? The truth was, maybe she could.

The week crawled by. By Sunday, Erin was feeling a bit more clarity around her decision, but she was still uneasy. That night at dinner she told her parents about her dilemma. She told them how she knew the “right thing” to do was probably to tell her teacher about the mistake, but she also knew how competitive grades and college applications were at her school. Even despite the lower grade in chemistry, she worked hard as a student and deserved to go to a good school as much as anyone, and that grade would affect her overall GPA. At the same time, how would it feel to finish off the year seeing that teacher in the hallway every day, or how will it feel next year looking back on this choice?

What should Erin do?

**DISCUSSION STARTERS**

* What might make this decision a hard one for Erin? Would this be a difficult decision for you? Why? Why not?
* Why do you think Erin waited almost a week to talk to her parents about her dilemma? If you were in her shoes, how long would you wait? Would you tell them at all? Would your choice depend on whether you told your parents or not?
* What you do in Erin’s place? Explain how and why you would.
* Erin’s friend had a strong opinion about what she should do. How much would your friends’ input affect your choice?
* If you were Erin’s friend, what points might you tell her that might help her make her decision?
* What traits does one need to have to be a “good student”?
* If Erin chose to keep the mistake a secret, does that make her guilty of “academic dishonesty”?
* Have you or someone you know ever had to make a similar choice where it felt like there was lot to lose in the process?

**SITUATION #5**

Jeff and his best friend, Steven go to different high schools. They’ve been friends since third grade, but since Jeff transferred to another school for 10th grade, they’ve started to grow apart.

One Saturday, Steven asked Jeff if he would drive him into the nearest city. He didn’t have his license yet and said he thought it would be fun for them to hang out. Jeff felt uncomfortable saying yes because he’d only had his license for six months and his parents told him he wasn’t allowed to drive into the city yet. But, Steven said that he wouldn’t be able to go without Jeff’s help and they never got to see each other anymore. Jeff agreed and they left that afternoon after telling Jeff’s parents they were driving to another friend’s house.

When they got to the city, Steven asked Jeff to drive across town to a particular address. When they arrived, Steven asked Jeff to wait in the car while he ran inside for a few minutes. After Steven returned to the car Jeff asked what was going on and Steven pulled out a bag of marijuana. He admitted it was his drug connection and that it was perfectly safe. When Jeff asked him why, he didn’t tell him that was why they came to the city. Steven said he didn’t tell him because he figured Jeff wouldn’t go.

That night Jeff couldn’t sleep because he felt overwhelmed by what he had found out. He knew using marijuana was harmful and that Steven would continue using it with or without his help. He was angry that Steven had put him in the position of driving with an illegal substance, but even more importantly, he was worried about his friend.

Jeff had promised Steven he wouldn’t tell anyone about all this but it was driving him crazy. He had a teacher at school he really liked and trusted. He wanted to go to him and ask his advice. But what if the teacher decided to turn in his best friend? Jeff was torn about how best to protect Steven.

**DISCUSSION STARTERS:**

* What do you think about what Steven asks of Jeff? Is it fair? What would you do if your friend asked you to do the same thing?
* What obstacles did Jeff face in telling Steven he would go to the city with him?
* Have you ever been in a position where you had trouble saying you didn’t want to do something with a friend? What obstacles did you face?
* What would you tell someone to do that was in the same position as Jeff?
* Do you think Jeff should talk to the teacher he respects? If not, should he talk to anyone else? If so, who?
* How do you think it would affect the friendship if Steven finds out that Jeff told an adult the situation?
* How do you think Jeff will feel if he doesn’t tell anyone and Steven escalates his drug use?
* How do you think Jeff will feel if he tells his teacher and the teacher tells him that he has to tell his own parents, or tell Steven to tell someone?
* How do you personally weigh the friendship against the fact that the friend is doing something illegal and potentially problematic?
* What do you do with those thoughts/feelings that can arise when you are doing something that you intuitively know is maybe not the best thing to be doing?
* The definition of dilemma is a difficult choice to be made between two equally undesirable alternatives.  How do we decide? And, how do we choose to live with our choices? Have you ever been in a dilemma? What was it like and how did you deal with it?