**Four Overarching Ethical Principles in Psychology**

**and Several Connected Guidelines**

**Integrity** – The researcher should be committed to conducting the search for knowledge in an honest and ethical manner.

**Respect for persons** – The research must show consideration for the welfare, rights, beliefs, customs and cultural heritage of the participants involved in the research.

**Beneficence** – The dignity and welfare of the participants must have a higher priority than the expected benefits to knowledge. The researcher must maximise benefits and minimise the risk of harm to participants.

**Justice** – The benefits and burdens of the research should be fairly distributed within the population of research interest.

**Three Tasks: Ethical Principles, Participant Rights and Researcher Responsibilities**

Choose 3 of the rights and responsibilities below and complete the following activities:

**1:** Explain how each of **the rights or responsibilities you have chosen relates to an ethical principle.**

**2:** Identify which guideline(s) below and which ethical principle(s) above have been breached in each example provided in the box at the bottom of this page.

**3:** Suggest 2 examples of unethical experimental procedures, with explanations of why they would be unacceptable in practice.



**Participants’ Rights**

* No physical or psychological harm should occur
* Confidentiality – a right to privacy
* Voluntary participation – no pressure, no coercion!
* Withdrawal rights
* Informed consent
* Rules about the use of deception
* Debriefing – includes correcting any misleading impressions, explaining any deception and fully disclosing the results and conclusions of the study

**Role of the Experimenter/Researcher**

* No exploitation of participants
* No coercion of participants
* The welfare of the participant should be his/her main concern

**Identify the breached guideline, violated ethical principle or overlooked partipant rights…**

* A uni psych professor tells his psych students that they need to be participants in his research in order to gain a pass for his unit.
* Your cousin (7 years old) wants to complete a task related to Piaget’s theory of cognitive development with you. You have playdough for him! You test him without asking his parents.
* A personality test is given to you by a prospective employer who later passes the results on to a recruitment company.
* You are involved in a medical study for people with a rare form of cancer and notice that some patients’ health is improving, while yours is getting worse. This continues until the 6 months of the study are over.
* A teacher wants to introduce a new program for students and decides to give them pretesting in order to allocate them to appropriate groups. The test involves a probing psychological analysis and a group IQ test.

**Sample Answers with Buzz Words in Bold**

**Task 1:**

A participant in a research study should not be exposed to any **physical or psychological harm**. He/she has the **right to be treated in a humane way**.

The researcher has the **responsibility** to ensure that his/her participant’s **welfare is protected** at all times.

This right and this responsibility relate to the principle of “**respect for persons**”, since a participant’s **dignity** and **worth** as an individual can never be overlooked in any research study. It is not acceptable to **exploit** or **take advantage of** participants, even in the search for scientific understanding.

**Task 2:**

Example:

* You are involved in a medical study for people with a rare form of cancer and notice that some patients’ health is improving, while yours is getting worse. This continues until the 6 months of the study are over.

The principle of **justice** has been **breached** or **violated**. The findings of the study must be made available to all participants, including the benefits of new drug technology. Failure to follow this principle would mean that the participant is being **exploited** and his/her **well-being** is being harmed or ignored.

**Task 3:**

An example of an **unethical** experimental procedure would be

•giving a test to minors without gaining **permission** from parents or guardians

•using the test results in a manner not agreed to by the participants or their parents/guardians

•failing to provide the **benefits** of a new teaching program to disadvantaged students who had taken part in a program as members of the control group