

8.1 What is ethics?



Is it easy to make decisions?

Learning objectives

- To understand the terms 'relative' and 'absolute' morality
- To explore what might influence our decision making
- To reflect upon why people do not always make the same decisions

Objectives check

SMSC: SP1, M1, M4, S1, C1
BV: B3, B4, B5
GCSE objectives: AO1a, AO2

Linked lesson(s) from course

Links to all lessons.

GCSE skill-building

A4 and A5: AO1a (remembering, comprehending)
A1, A2 and A3: AO2 (analysing, synthesising, evaluating)
A6: AO2 (analysing, synthesising, comprehending)

GCSE content mapping

All thematic topics at GCSE rely on understanding the concept of ethics, and the ability to recognise absolute/relative morality

Key terms

absolute morality: unchanging moral code, giving a fixed attitude to an issue

morality: sense of right and wrong

relative morality: situation ethics; morality which is dependent on the circumstances of the situation, hence changeable

Essential basics

Morality is individual. We build our sense of morality over the whole of our lifetime and experience, so for most people it evolves throughout their life. There are many influences on us to shape our morality, starting with our parents/carers who are the single biggest influence. As we grow older, we become aware of and experience other sources of morality, which will further shape our thinking, e.g. peers, the law, teachers, etc. The point of this lesson is to help students see that decision making is a difficult process, affected by many considerations and influences – not at all straightforward at times. It is important to show that decision making is often a 'grey area', rather than simply black/white, because the rest of the Unit explores ethical issues and the diversity of attitudes to them.

Lesson guidance

Starter

Write on the board 'What influences your decision making?' Students to discuss this. They might suggest some/all of the following: parents, teachers, friends, law, social media, own experiences, what feels right, etc. Take ideas from the class. Explore if some sources are more influential than others and if they ever go against their gut feelings (and why). Alternatively, if available, use **Presentation 8.1** in the Explore RE Teaching & Learning Resources on Dynamic Learning as starter to lesson – introducing the idea of influence.

Main body

- Introduce the idea of dilemma: What do students understand by this term? A dilemma is a (negative) situation with several (often difficult) options, but no clear/easy one among them. Introduce the '3 bed, 4 patient' dilemma (the first part of **Worksheet 8.1** in the Explore RE Teaching & Learning Resources on Dynamic Learning could be used for this). It would be helped if students did not have open books immediately, and the initial information was written onto the board for them to see. Complete the Activities 1a and 1b in the Student Book, either as a written or an oral task. Student might say 1: Harry, 2: the oldest so he has had his life, 3: Saira is a baby, Mo is brave and deserves our support, Rebekka has children so they need her, 4: Harry is respected, and obviously did an important job in his life, so we should be thanking him by saving him. If done as an oral task, it can be done as a class, group or paired exercise – the point being to explore different opinions and reasons for them.
- Introduce the second layer of information from the Student Book. Students need to reconsider their original decision on the basis of this (**Worksheet 8.1** in the Explore RE Teaching & Learning Resources on Dynamic Learning can be used here). Complete Activity 2, either as written or oral task as above. Explore how students' thinking has changed, and why. As students now have more information which influences attitudes to each person, their decision making may have changed. For example, we now know that Harry is most likely to survive, so do we give him the bed?

- It is possible here to issue a third set of information to further complicate the thinking. This would be especially useful with higher ability groups. For example, Harry has early signs of dementia; Saira's organs, if she died, would be used for transplant; Mo has PTSD and has been in prison for violent assault twice; Rebekka is the daughter of a local MP at a time the hospital is facing cuts.
- Having established the idea that decisions can change, introduce the terms 'absolute morality' and 'relative morality'. Go over the Student Book information which explains these and uses examples. It is possible to use the second part of **Worksheet 8.1** in the Explore RE Teaching & Learning Resources on Dynamic Learning here.
- Revisit the different influences we have (ideas around the page, plus from their starter work). Use Activity 3 to bring in the final element of indirect and personal influences (boxes on page). **Presentation 8.1** in the Explore RE Teaching & Learning Resources on Dynamic Learning could be used here to further explore some of the key influences. Explore how knowing more information and individual circumstances in a dilemma can complicate the decision making still further (just as knowing more in the scenarios made the decision more difficult). Make the final point of religion being a significant influence on the decision making of religious believers, as this leads into the ethical considerations of the rest of the unit. So, for example, in the scenario if a person believed in the sanctity of life, they would have struggled to decide in any case. This will help with Activity 4.
- Students complete the activities.

Plenary

- Revisit the lesson objectives orally with the class to check learning from the lesson or revisit the lesson's Big question.
- Done orally or in writing; could take the form of a question to the whole class. Think of a difficult decision you had to make. What was the biggest influence on that decision for you? Why?

Extension / homework**Extension options**

- Provide written answers to the tasks found below each of the tables in the Student Book.
- **Presentation 8.1** in the Explore RE Teaching & Learning Resources on Dynamic Learning plenary task could be completed in writing.

Homework options

- Find the moral code from one religion (see pages 20, 40, 104, 140, 162, 192, 215 of the Student Book). Do you think it is possible to keep all of this code on a daily basis? Explain your answer.
- Write the five most important principles which you live by as a young person. Do you think these will always be the most important principles for you? Explain your answer.

'Flipped' element

- Find out what the following are: morality, dilemma, moral code.

Activity guidance / mark scheme

Activities 1a, 1b, 2a and 2b have probably been reached through discussion, and reflect personal opinion.

4 Many influences, e.g. parents, friends, the law, religion, media, social media, famous people, etc.

5 Absolute morality: unchanging idea of what is right/wrong; always sticking to the rules; never considering the circumstances, just applying the rule.

Relative morality: situational decision making; changeable attitude depending on the situation/circumstances.

6 *Mark according to qualities iii, v, xii.* (Personal opinion, demand examples to develop points made.) Responses might include:

Agree: The emotions which are involved can make it more difficult, e.g. if the decision affects you directly and personally. / There are too many variables to make a decision easy, especially on a difficult topic, e.g. many people and their attitudes to consider in the issue of euthanasia. / Not everyone might agree with your decision, which makes it difficult to make/state/keep to; etc.

Disagree: As an absolute moralist, you only have to think about the rule, which is easy to do. / It is when it is a simple dilemma, e.g. pizza or pie for dinner. / For some issues, there is a straightforward decision which most people agree with, e.g. murder is wrong; etc.