

THE ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

“A foundation on which to build daily behavior”

Produced by The Triangle Interfaith Alliance

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Preface

Tomorrow’s Vision - - - Today’s Reality

Vision for Tomorrow

In order to achieve a better quality of life for all, ethical and moral living needs to become an important part of American culture. “The Ethical Framework” provides the basic principles that constitute a pathway toward such a culture. Harmonious interaction with others, to achieve the best for all, means relying on each other. If we expect to receive the respect, understanding, trust, and help we all need, we must give the same to others. Living influenced by a strong ethical and moral foundation could reduce or eliminate most societal problems in this country. “The Ethical Framework” could be the cornerstone of a new culture of caring and responsibility in America, which could be the missing link in our democracy.

Can society and culture achieve a spirit of harmony and better relationships, based on mutual help, respect, trust and confidence, and on working together for the common good? Could people be unselfish and considerate, rejecting unethical and immoral behavior and refraining from doing harmful things to each other? Imagine obedience to laws, not because of fear of penalty, but because laws are for the common good, and obeying them is the right thing to do. Imagine a less stressful life, more fulfilling, healthier, and happier for everyone. That is the vision that can become reality through widespread study and use of “The Ethical Framework.”

Today’s Reality

A natural tension exists between self-interest and the common good. Self interest in America has reached the point of entitlement to pursue individual rights and personal interest to the exclusion of the effect on others or the community. There is no expectation or law that behavior must be ethical, responsible, or fair, *as long as it is legal*. People, even our leaders, defend unethical and immoral behavior by saying “I’ve done nothing illegal.” Nevertheless, strictly legal behavior without a moral or ethical conscience can be and often is hurtful to others and to the common good. Without norms for commonly expected ethical and moral behavior, people pursue their own self-interest at the expense

of other individuals or groups. The resulting unpredictable behavior makes it difficult to trust and deal with one another, including our leaders and institutions.

Consider how the media bombards the public daily with incidents of killing, abuse, cheating, misleading, lying, theft, and greed. Societal problems include every imaginable obstacle to positive human development. Racial and ethnic tension, drug abuse, homelessness, poverty, broken families, and economic class disparities result in crime and violence of every sort. Violations of the intent and spirit of laws are common occurrences. Society seems to accept these problems as inevitable, even though many people would like to see changes. We should not accept the unacceptable.

If ethical and moral behavior were important in our society, societal problems would be reduced, if not eliminated. In our system and culture, ethical and moral behavior is often trivialized and rarely rewarded. We have lists of the most powerful and wealthiest persons and corporations but no lists for the most ethical and moral.

The Ethical Framework -- Principles of Essential Human Values

“The Ethical Framework” is a compilation of simple, easy to understand, ethical and moral principles which focus on taking into account the common good and considering the interests of other individuals as well as one’s own. “The Ethical Framework” is offered as a foundation for dealing with others, individually and in groups. Part of the Triangle Interfaith Alliance (TIA) mission states “To promote harmony, trust, and understanding among all religions, races, and groups, and among all people.” That is exactly the result envisioned if the Framework were used voluntarily in daily life and presented in many different group settings, including schools.

TIA is a North Carolina affiliate of The Interfaith Alliance, a national nonprofit non-partisan grassroots organization, open to all people of good will. Desiring to be a unifying force in society with focus on agreement and positive attitudes, TIA believes that many people would welcome and unite behind a voluntary ethical framework as a foundation for daily human behavior.

“The Ethical Framework” is based on the following underlying precepts:

- 1. Respect for the basic dignity and inherent worth of every person.**
- 2. Consideration for the interests of others and the common good.**
- 3. Consideration of all actions in terms of desirable ethical and moral outcomes, rather than on solely legal or convenient results.**

Many people intuitively try to live their lives considering effects on others, on the community, and on the nation, and doing no harm; however many others do not. For these, the Framework is needed to provide clear societal expectations and responsibilities which can keep people’s rights and actions from clashing.

The Golden Rule - An Impossible Ideal?

Ethics and morals, are to some degree already planted in both secular and religious cultures. Most Americans know what is called “The Golden Rule” which says we should do to others what we would want done to ourselves. (Thirteen variations of this universal rule found in as many different religions are listed in the appendix.) However, people do not actually live by “The Golden Rule.” To live by high ideals in the midst of daily contrary forces is very difficult.

“The Ethical Framework” does not pretend to replace “The Golden Rule,” “The Ten Commandments,” or any religious teaching; nor does it take away from parents the responsibility for teaching ethics and morals. The decay of ethics and morals in our nation indicates that parents and religion could use some support. Thus “The Ethical Framework” can be viewed as a tool to assist parents, and religious and civic groups as well as all individuals in implementing the Golden Rule or other ethical and moral teachings by which they seek to live.

The Framework gives encouragement to thinking about ethical and moral values as daily decisions are made. From a realistic and practical perspective, an ethical and moral society would improve the quality of life in America. It could move our country to a level of harmony and community worthy of worldwide emulation.

Intended Ways For Use

1. “The Ethical Framework” is a compilation of simple ethical and moral principles for one’s attitude and behavior which affect other persons, individually and in groups, and society as a whole. They focus on *considering the common good and the interests of others, as well as one’s own*. The principles are consistent with the mainstream of both religious and secular society. They are applicable to all people, whether they are acting for themselves or for others, or representing organizations such as business, government, religious, civic, or charitable organizations.

While the Framework is intended primarily to guide one’s own behavior, it can also be used to identify and question unethical and immoral behavior of others, especially persons in power in corporations, government, etc.

2. Recognizing that life is very complex and that sometimes everyone confronts very tough choices, the principles are not absolutes. Nor are they intended to be an exhaustive or complete list. Rather than solve problems, the principles provide a foundation on which to build solutions and guide daily behavior. Thinking about one’s own ethical and moral beliefs in daily decision-making is made easier. Although the Framework’s principles remain constant, how they are applied can vary depending on the situation. Solving the complicated issues or providing answers to every conceivable ethical question is still each individual’s responsibility.

When questions arise, one may ask, “What am I doing and why am I doing it?” “Would I want everyone to act this way in a similar situation?” “Would I feel comfortable if I had to explain what I do?” “Which of the Framework’s principles can I use and apply?” “Which of the Principles support my actions or feelings?” Individuals are encouraged to consider each set of circumstances and use common sense, reason, and good judgment to apply the Principles. They should be used only for worthwhile purposes and for good expected outcomes, not followed thoughtlessly in every case. Exceptions to these principles may occur if others will be hurt unnecessarily, or if a person will be hurt by exposing another’s unethical behavior.

Deviating from the Principles can result in the need to give compelling reasons to justify one’s actions and the risk of public or private criticism by others.

Although ethical behavior is often ignored in conditions such as war, oppression by dictators, and political expediency, such practice is not to be condoned.

The Framework offers minimal guidelines, not limitations; individuals can certainly go beyond this level of ethical and moral principles, based on their own faith and beliefs.

3. No part of the Framework stands alone. All parts are integral to its letter and spirit. Where two principles lead to contradictory results, a solution should be reached that is within the spirit of the entire “Ethical Framework.” Following the basic intent eliminates the tendency to seek “loopholes” or avoidance techniques.

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Broad Principle Number One

*Be **for** people rather than **against** people.*

Consider others · Consider the common good

Specific Principles of Attitude and Behavior

1. Before deciding an issue, seriously consider the thoughts and feelings of those directly affected and give them a voice in the process.
2. Listen carefully to others, seeking to understand their perspectives.
3. Speak the truth. Do not start or spread false information, and refrain from providing information that would unnecessarily hurt others.
4. Do not divulge any confidential information.
5. Have respect for every person, including one’s self.
6. Be open to new information and insights.
7. Refuse to evaluate others without knowledge and understanding of the facts.
8. Refuse to: hate, dehumanize, demonize, discriminate, stereotype.
9. Condemn and reject:
 - Injustice, oppression, persecution, cruelty, tyranny, brutality, abuse.
 - Any sort of exploitation: social, political, economic, sexual.
 - The abuse of power including selfish exploitation of a system.
 - Harassment and invasion of privacy.
10. Balance self interest with consideration for consequences to others and the common good.

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Broad Principle Number Two

Treat people with care and concern, and strive for harmony.

Build caring, trusting relationships.

Specific Principles of Attitude and Behavior (with examples to clarify each)

1. **Be kind:** humane, helpful, accommodating, obliging, assisting others.
2. **Be caring and compassionate:** show regard and concern for others.
3. **Be unselfish:** sharing, thinking of others, considering others' needs.
4. **Be empathetic:** consider others' ideas and feelings from their perspective.
5. **Be honest:** (two meanings)
 - a) frank, open, above board, correct false impressions and misinformation.
 - b) refuse to steal or cheat, do not take what doesn't belong to you or take credit for anything to which you are not entitled, do not deceive.
6. **Be truthful:** correct, accurate, complete, refuse to lie, deceive, mislead, or tell half truths, do not give false information or omit part of the truth.
7. **Be trustworthy and worthy of confidence:** keep your word and your commitments, reliable, dependable, take responsibility for your behavior - admit wrongs and make restitution.
8. **Be fair and equitable:** reasonable and just, even handed, equal consequences for equal actions, apply same rules equally to all people (men and women, rich and poor, black and white, etc.), free from favoritism.
9. **Be respectful of others:** polite, courteous, and civil.
10. **Be forgiving:** Refuse to hold grudges, or seek vengeance or retribution.
11. **Be remorseful:** admit wrongdoing and express regret, sorrow, and determination not to do such wrongs again; expect and accept the consequences.

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Broad Principle Number Three

Respect the Wonder of Life.

Life is precious and sacred.

Specific Principles of Attitude and Behavior

1. Refuse to put others at risk without their knowledge and consent.
 2. Refuse to cause bodily harm or death knowingly or purposefully, except in self - defense or to defend others from a clear and present threat of harm.
 3. Demonstrate care, concern, and preservation for all animal and plant life.
-

Broad Principle Number Four

*Accept responsibility to people collectively
and to society as a whole.*

As members of society, all have responsibilities.

Specific Principles of Attitude and Behavior

1. The environment, the earth, space beyond the earth’s atmosphere, and all natural resources deserve care, concern, preservation and conservation.
2. Contribute to the common good.
3. Respect the property of others.
4. Fulfill one’s *public trust*. If one is relied on by the public for products, services, information, or any other reason, that person has a responsibility to protect the public’s interests and well-being by maintaining a high standard of ethical and moral behavior. This includes people in government, media, health, safety, education, business, professions, and many others.

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Broad Principle Number Five

Accept one’s own share of society’s responsibilities.

Support society’s obligation to provide every person access to a decent quality of life.

Specific Principles of Attitude and Behavior

1. Support society in providing every person with access to food and water, clothing, shelter, health care, education, and job training.
2. Support society in providing every person with access to meaningful employment with equitable and sufficient compensation, and to associated transportation and child care as needed.
3. Support society by being the best that one can be; by making the effort to provide oneself with the best possible education and skills, and the most productive employment.

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Expected Outcomes

Better Individuals · Better Communities · Better Country

The Triangle Interfaith Alliance offers this body of Ethical and Moral Principles for all Americans to unite behind and share, in order to achieve the following expected outcomes; all for the well-being and betterment of individuals, of our nation and its communities, and of our entire society:

Following the Principles would encourage the moral nature of human beings and bring out the best in people. This would lead to a more caring, respectful, harmonious, equitable, and safe society. Harmony, unity, and secure, dependable relationships would become part of our nation’s culture. The total effect would foster psychological and spiritual well-being and enable more fulfilling lives. The quality of life in America would improve, and ethical and moral principles would be recognized as major components of personal success and good citizenship.

Secure, Dependable Relationships

- a) Mutual Confidence
- b) Trust
- c) Believability
- d) Credibility
- e) Respect

Unity

- a) Collaboration and Ability to Work With Others
- b) Mutual Help
- c) Cooperation
- d) Respectful and Thoughtful Discussion
- e) Communication and Dialogue
- f) Better Decisions and Error Prevention

Psychological and Spiritual Well - Being

- a) Self Confidence
- b) Self Esteem
- c) Feel Good
- d) Less Stress
- e) Personal Fulfillment
- f) Personal Satisfaction
- g) Sense of Community and Connection

Harmony

- a) Goodwill
- b) Friendship
- c) Mutual Acceptance of Diversity
- d) Peace
- e) Forgiveness and Healing
- f) Understanding

APPENDIX

DEFINITIONS

1. **Ethical Framework** - Ethical and moral essential human values that are the foundation for relationships and dealing with people.
2. **Ethics and Morals** - Basic principles of attitude and behavior, taking into account and considering the common good, and the interests of others as well as your own.
3. **Sacred** - Revered, respected.
4. **Wrongdoing** - Bad intent, bad results, or both.
5. **Dignity**- Respectability, self esteem, honor.
6. **Intrinsic, inherent** - Built in, inborn, natural, basic.
7. **Harmony** - Peace, understanding, unity.
8. **Preservation** - Protection from wasteful and improper use.
9. **Self - interest** - Considering only your own interests and benefit.

APPENDIX

SOME VARIETIES OF THE GOLDEN RULE

Hinduism: “This is the sum of duty. Do not unto others that which would cause you pain if done to you.”
Mahabharata 5:1517

Judaism: (Positive) “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Bible, Leviticus 19.18
(Negative) “What is hateful to you, do not do to others.” Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a

Taoism: “Regard your neighbor’s gain as your own gain and your neighbor’s loss as your own loss.”
T’ai Shang Kan Ying P’ien

Buddhism: “Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.” Udana-Varga, 5:18

Zoroastrianism: “That nature alone is good which refrains from doing unto another whatsoever is not good for itself.” Dadistan -I-Dinik, 94:5

Confucianism: “Tsekung asked, Is there one word that can serve as a principal of conduct for life?
Confucius replied, It is the word shu—reciprocity: Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you.” Analects 15.23 (ca 500BC)

Christianity: “In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you.” Bible, Matthew 7.12

Islam: “Act with people the way you would like them to act with you”.
Al - Malati, *Kitab at - Tanbih*, Attributed to Muhamad

Jainism: “One should treat all beings as he himself would be treated.” Agamas, Sutakritanga 1.10, 1-3

Sikhism: “Treat others as thou wouldst be treated thyself.” Adi Granth

African Traditional: “One going to take a pointed stick to pinch a baby bird should first try it on himself to feel how it hurts.” Yoruba proverb (Nigeria)

Native American: “Respect for all life is the foundation.” The Great Law of Peace

Baha’I: “Desire not for anyone the things that ye would not desire for yourselves.” Baha Ullah LXVI

Secular : “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”

Secular Modern Variation: “Do unto others as they would want done unto them.”

This modern variation recognizes that all people are different and may not want the same things done to them. Therefore it requires us to do to people, not what we would want them to do to us, but what they would want us to do to them, within the boundaries of reason and good sense.