

How Your Conscience Works

- Conscience integrates capacities for emotional arousal, mental representation, and behavioral self-regulation
- The emotional features of conscience include self-focused and other-oriented arousal that reinforces and motivates acceptable behavior and punishes and inhibits inappropriate behavior. Self-focused emotion includes negative (e.g., guilt) and positive (e.g., pride) arousal, dependent on whether one's behavior contradicts or promotes internal standards
- This negative emotion discourages future violations and may be assuaged through corrective action. The empathic component prompts awareness of the effects of one's actions on the feelings of others and elicits emotional arousal (e.g., concern), both of which influence behavior choices
- The mental representation component of conscience allows one to store and reference prototypes of moral conduct. Such representations are based on direct articulation and modeling of values and appropriate behavior (e.g., by parents)
- Conscience formation is unique to one's particular assimilation of life experiences and socialization
- A central component of conscience is the capacity for impulse control, attention, and sustained effort, known as behavioral self-regulation. Without adequate self-regulation, the other components of conscience may not be consistently expressed in moral behavior

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