

The Importance of Conscience and Moral Development for Our Next Generation

What is Conscience?

It is the voice in your head, and the feeling in your heart, that tells you if something is right or wrong. You use it to guide your actions to do right.

If you had ever thought about doing something you knew wasn't ok, and a voice in your head said, "Maybe you shouldn't do that. You might get in trouble." That's your conscience!

Your conscience is your inner guide and it helps you figure out how to make good choices. As you grow up, you learn right from wrong. Your conscience is the thought and feeling you have that tells you whether something is a right or wrong thing to do or say. "Listen to your conscience" means you hear and feel the messages your conscience sends you, which you then use to make a good choice.



良知是我們靈魂的窗口；惡念是窗簾，使人心盲。

Conscience is the window of our spirit, evil is the curtain.

- Douglas Horton

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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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