

# Ethical Issues in Psychology

**Read this side then turn over:**

These arise when a dilemma exists between participants' rights and researchers' needs to gain valuable and meaningful findings. This conflict has implications for the safety and wellbeing of participants.

Here are 4 of the main ethical issues that psychology has to consider:

<p><b>Informed consent</b> Participants in studies should know what they are getting into before they sign up! Informed consent means that they should know the aims, procedures and their right to withdraw (during the investigation if they want to).</p>	<p><b>Deception</b> Deliberately misleading or withholding information from participants! If there is any deception then this will also mean they have not given <i>informed</i> consent. Sometimes deception can be justified if it does not cause the participants undue stress.</p>
<p><b>Protection from harm</b> This is about risk! Participants should not be put at any significant risk; they should be safe from psychological harm (such as embarrassment, stress or pressure) and physical harm. An important point here is the right to withdraw (see above), which helps reduce the potential for harm.</p>	<p><b>Privacy and confidentiality</b> Participants have the right to control information about themselves, it is private! Confidentiality is enshrined in law under the Data Protection Act. The right to privacy extends to the area where a study took place, so that there are no obvious clues about who the participants were. In other words, if a psychologist invades your privacy, they must keep the data confidential.</p>

The British Psychological Society issues a set of ethical guidelines. These guidelines are matched to the ethical issues above. They are implemented by ethics committees in research institutions who often use a **cost-benefit approach** to determine whether research proposals are acceptable.

**Benefits** = upsides of doing the research this way; value of the research; positives about studying this topic, any ethical advantages

**Costs** = damage to people; danger of harm, stress, embarrassment; downsides of doing the research this way, any ethical problems

## AQA Psychology TRANSITION WORK

**Now do this:** Imagine you are sitting on an ethics committee. Should the following investigations go ahead? Do a cost-benefit analysis of each.

Study	Write your costs and benefits in here
<p>A teacher wants to research the evils of prejudice so actively discriminates against the children who have blue eyes in her Year 5 class (and encourages the non-blue-eyed classmates to do the same) by withholding privileges and giving them more difficult tasks to do.</p> <p>This was a study to demonstrate the evils of prejudice (Elliott 1968).</p>	Costs:
	Benefits:
<b>Should the study above go ahead?</b>	
<p>A researcher wants to investigate behaviour in an emergency.</p> <p>As a naïve participant sits in a waiting room, (fake) smoke is pumped under the door suggesting that the next room is on fire. A group of confederates have been told to remain passive and not raise the alarm.</p> <p>This is an investigation into the factors that influence behaviour in an emergency (Latane &amp; Darley 1968)</p>	Costs:
	Benefits:
<b>Should the study above go ahead?</b>	
<p>What is meant by the term <b>debrief</b>? What does a debrief involve?</p>	

## **AQA Psychology TRANSITION WORK**

Answer these questions:

**1. What is standard deviation?**

- a. It is a measure of the dispersion of data
- b. It is a measure of the average in a set of data
- c. It is a measure of whether a hypothesis has been supported by a set of data

**2. What is a correlation?**

- a. It is a test of the difference between two variables
- b. It is a measure of a relationship between two co-variables
- c. It is a way of showing how one variable causes another

**3. What is the difference between a laboratory experiment and a natural experiment?**

- a. A laboratory experiment takes place in a controlled environment but a natural experiment takes place in a natural setting where the researcher manipulates a variable
- b. A laboratory experiment takes place in a controlled environment but a natural experiment takes place in a natural setting where the researcher does not manipulate a variable

**4. Find the AQA website, go to Psychology (A-level) and then find the specification. Identify three sub-topics within the BioPsychology topic on Paper 2.**

1.

2.

3.