

Ethical Code for Student Activities that Involve Human Interactions

The mission of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health is dedicated to the education of a diverse group of research scientists and public health professionals, a process inseparably linked to the discovery and application of new knowledge, and through these activities, to the improvement of health and prevention of disease and disability around the world.

All activities that involve interaction with people or use of their personal information, whether for public health practice, class activities or research projects, require the highest standards of professional and ethical behavior towards others. Although there are times that collecting information from or about people is not technically “human subjects research” the expectation of the School is that all members of the public in general and the local community in particular will be treated with the same level of respect, fairness and protection of their individual rights as are participants in formal research projects that are subject to IRB oversight.

Basic expectations are described below.

1. For direct interactions with individuals, the purpose and nature of the activity must be clearly described and the potential participant be given an opportunity to agree or decline to participate. For research studies this is called “informed consent”; for non-research activities this is a less formal agreement. Such an agreement does not require that a participant sign anything; simply that they have been provided complete information even if it is verbal, with an opportunity for them to ask questions and make sure they understand. In general, parents should be informed of activities involving their children, and provide permission. Elements of informed consent/agreement to participate should include:
 - a. a brief explanation of the purpose of the activity;
 - b. explanation of why the individual was selected for participation;
 - c. what they’re being asked to do;
 - d. the approximate amount of time it will take;
 - e. that the activity is voluntary, meaning they have the right to simply say no if they do not want to participate; and
 - f. that if they do agree to participate, they will have the right to refrain from answering any questions including having the right to stop participating at any time.

2. **Respect for Persons:** All individuals must be treated with respect, courtesy, and discretion. Be aware that subjects that may be normal topics of discussion with your peers may be viewed as sensitive or intrusive by members of different age groups or cultures. Unless the project is conducted with IRB oversight, do not ask others to report on illegal activities or provide opinions that may compromise their job security. Recognize that children are people too and even if a parent agrees that they can participate, the child must also be allowed to say no.
3. **Privacy:** All interactions with individuals must be conducted in such a way as to protect their personal privacy. Discussions of sensitive topics must take place where others cannot overhear. Be sensitive to situations in which onlookers may misinterpret your presence or questioning of others. Interacting with adolescents or children raise special concerns, including those outlined in the JHU Child Safety Protocol, and the potential need for parental notification.
4. **Data Security and confidentiality:** Identifiable personal data, regardless of how seemingly innocuous they may seem, require maximum data protections. The biggest risk of loss occurs during data transport – whether physical transport, or electronic. If you plan to keep identifiers, separate them from the data and use a numeric code system. Use encryption and other protective methodologies when transporting sensitive and identifiable electronic data. The primary source of data loss reported to us is due to theft from vehicles– do not leave data on a laptop or other device in a car for any period longer than absolutely necessary for its transport.