



## Research Methods: Ethics

**Ethical issues:** Moral concerns arising from research.

**Deception:** Deliberately misleading or falsely informing participants about the nature of research.

**Valid consent:** Includes giving participants enough information (in a form they can understand) so that they can make an informed choice about whether they wish to participate.

**Risks of stress, anxiety, humiliation or pain:** Research that could induce more than minimal pain through repetitive or prolonged testing. Invasive testing, such as the administration of drugs, or vigorous physical exercise, would not usually be encountered in everyday life and are considered unethical.

**Risks to participants' values, beliefs, relationships, status or privacy:** Research that is likely to face this type of risk focuses on socially sensitive topics (e.g. sexuality) and includes potentially sensitive data (e.g. confidential documents).

**Confidentiality:** Third parties should not be able to trace information back to individual participants. This is usually achieved through providing **anonymity**, e.g. using participant numbers not names.

**Working with vulnerable individuals:** Children under the age of 16, those lacking in mental capacity, people in care, people in custody (prison) or on probation, and people engaged in illegal activities, such as drug use, would be categorised in this way. Issues of consent are of particular concern.

**Working with animals:** Research with non-human species is strictly controlled. Restrictions on type of animal, care, number of animals required etc. are all controlled by ethical guidelines and laws such as the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act (1986) and the 3Rs. Examples include replacing the use of animals with other forms of testing where possible, considering the choice of species and strain – e.g. using only species that are ethically and scientifically suitable to the subject matter being studied, reducing the number of animals used and refining procedures to ensure any tasks/research does not cause unnecessary death, harm or illness to the animal. Researchers working with animals must also obtain the relevant licenses from the Home Office.

## Assessment

AO1:	Demonstrate knowledge of ethical issues and ways of dealing with ethical issues in psychology.
AO2:	Apply knowledge of ethical issues and ways of dealing with them to novel scenarios, developmental (Kohlberg) and social (Milgram) psychology, and to the personal investigations (Unit 4 only).

**Ways of dealing with ethical issues:** Methods such as ethical committees and guidelines must be used in ALL research. With humans, the concepts of debriefing and **right to withdraw** (ensuring the participant knows their right to not participate or leave the study at any time during the collection of data) are essential.

**Ethical guidelines:** Provide a set of moral principles that guide research from its inception through to completion and publication of results.

**Ethical committees:** The board that is in place to ensure that proposed research meets the standards of the current ethical codes of conduct and guidelines. There will be a cost-benefit analysis of the research and suggestions will be made for any modifications that are deemed necessary to protect participants.

**Debriefing:** A method which aims to ensure participants are aware of the true nature of the study (overcoming any deception). It should return the participant back to their original state.