

Using the Internet to Study Bioethical Issues
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Pick up a copy of the ***Washington Post*** any day of the week and you will invariably find an article on a bioethical issue written by Rick Weiss or another reporter. Last summer's news, before the tragic events of 9/11, very heatedly focused on the ethics of stem cell research.

Bioethics touches our lives in so many ways—just think of therapeutic cloning, euthanasia, bio-terrorism, eugenics, and genetic engineering—just to name a few of the issues that have been newsworthy in that few years. It is essential for parents and their teenagers to explore and discuss these issues and the possible impact such topics could have on their lives.

At Georgetown Visitation we have been offering a course in bioethics for over two decades. Never has this subject been more relevant. We are faced with incredible scenarios we could hardly have envisioned even a few short years ago. Who could have predicted that a 63 year old woman would give birth or that a cloned sheep named Dolly would herald even more unbelievable things to come?

If you are not lucky enough to be a senior at Visitation and have the luxury of studying bioethics for a whole semester, there are still ways for parents and their teenagers to research many of these issues by exploring a number of excellent web sites on the internet. At Georgetown Visitation, using the web on a regular basis occurs in some religion classes, particularly in the bioethics course, where instruction has been web-based for six years.

My students and their parents often comment that class discussions often spill into serious and lively dinner conversations at home. Perhaps you, the reader, may want to consider investigating a relevant bioethical issue on your own—or with a child at home if you have one or more teenagers. But where do you start your research?

Let's begin with the question: What is Ethics? If you've long forgotten the principles once learned in philosophy courses, there are quick ways to brush up on your knowledge. Doing a search on the internet can furnish you with a general introduction to morality, medical ethics, provide you with a framework for moral decision-making, and review what is meant by ethical relativism, deontology, and a utilitarian approach to ethics. Some sites will provides links to the characteristics of Catholic ethics, what it takes to build and form your conscience, and to the **Catechism of the Catholic Church**, and other relevant teachings and encyclicals. You will also find case studies, tutorials, and this article, guaranteed to elicit interesting conversation: *"In Whose Image? Remaking Humanity Through Cybernetics and Nanotechnology."*

An excellent site worth noting is (www.bioethics.net). This site includes two links worth exploring with a son or daughter. **Bioethics for Beginners** is a wonderful resource for high school students, and includes pages aimed at helping students with homework in this field. Another valuable link, **Bioethics on NBC's ER**, explores some of the ethical dilemmas covered in various episodes. **The Kennedy Institute of Ethics at Georgetown University** in our own backyard provides a link to the **High School Bioethics Project**, another valuable site.

To fully explore the Church's teaching regarding bioethics, start with the **National Catholic Bioethics Center**, (www.ncbcenter.org) in addition to **Ethics and Medics**, a useful newsletter (www.ethicsandmedics.com). Many Catholic universities and colleges host centers for the study of bioethics and are worth exploring. You might try searching for a listing of all major Papal encyclicals and pastoral letters by the U.S. Bishops. With the internet, access to these are now at your fingertips.

There are excellent medical sites that should be consulted, and all of the major medical publications, such as the **New England Journal of Medicine** can be accessed on-line. Medscape (www.medscape.com) is a user-friendly site.

There are resources out there too numerous to list. These are three of my favorites:

Ethics Updates, (<http://ethics.sandiego.edu/index.asp>) a comprehensive site for issues and ethical philosophy. It is hosted by a college professor, and includes powerpoint presentations of his lectures.

Bioethics Discussion Pages, (<http://www-hsc.usc.edu/~mbernste/>) hosted by a medical doctor.

National Institutes of Health (www.nih.gov/sigs/bioethics).

Using the internet with your son or daughter to explore complex bioethical dilemmas provides an opportunity for serious dialogue, and insures that your child will be able to deal with increasingly difficult scenarios and situations down the road. I know my students will be faced with making decisions I may not have to consider. Having your teenager become more informed on these issues and having a framework for making moral decisions in place will make it easier.