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Hold On Tight

Heading into high school, I was scared. I had been homeschooled and lived a fairly sheltered life up until then. I hadn't experienced dealing with the tough pressures brought on by peers: drinking, doing drugs, smoking, cussing, cheating, and many other unhealthy habits. I wasn't sure if I would be faced with these temptations, but sure enough, I was. And I didn't know how I would cope with them. Then I realized I needed one basic but hard-to-follow virtue: integrity.

Although I have never been tempted to smoke or do drugs, I have been faced with the option to drink alcohol. Each week, some students show up drunk to our school's football games. I've been told that I would have more "fun" if I drank too, but I knew that it would be wrong to do so, and that I could have just as much fun if I didn't give into peer pressure. Even though I may be less popular because of my decision, I feel good about myself knowing I have the integrity needed to do the right thing. Staying firm in one's moral beliefs is the most valuable decision a teenager could make when coping with the many challenges of high school.

Another temptation I have faced is to cheat on my work. During my Driver's Education test, the answer sheet was lying on the teacher's desk, and she was out of the room. Some of my classmates were peeking at it and invited me to do the same, and I struggled for a while as to whether I should look too. But I finally decided that I had to hold firm to my values and beliefs, regardless of what others around me were doing. I didn't get a very good grade on the test, but I had a clear conscience knowing it was my true score. That day, I realized that I need to rely on myself to accomplish my goals, not the wrongdoings of others, which can only be achieved with integrity at my side.

I have also had to use my sense of integrity to resist using and gossiping about people. At times it would have been convenient to use others to escape punishment and save myself, but I have instead chosen to take responsibility for my actions. Once, I got in trouble with a bus driver for throwing food to a friend. She asked who threw the food, and wouldn't let anyone off of the bus until someone admitted to it. It took me a minute to realize that I needed to confess that it was indeed me, even though I had to miss class to sweep the bus as a punishment, while everyone went on without me. I could have easily blamed someone else, but deep inside, I felt committed to act according to my values. Also, I have to admit that I have a habit of gossiping, but I am continually trying not to spread false and hurtful rumors about others to make myself look better. I know that I should be able to make a good reputation for myself through my own actions instead of having to embarrass others for my name's sake, and would thereby be practicing integrity.

I am not perfect, nor do I always act with integrity, but I do recognize that integrity is not just important to have as an adult. Rather, teenagers like me should be making an effort to exercise integrity in their daily lives, because it is truly the most important value one could have.

It is the ability to hold on tight to one's values: no matter how difficult it may be, no matter the consequences, no matter what.