

## **2024-2025 Middle School Ethics Bowl Case Set**

To learn more about this event, please visit:

<https://www.ethicsatkentplace.org/student-programs/middle-school-ethics-bowl>

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## Case 1: To Persevere or To Pass

Luca, Joseph and Max are 6th graders at Big Horn Middle School in Arizona. They have been best friends for years. As they've grown, these three students have developed different interests and perspectives on life and politics. By and large, though, they have found ways to continue their friendship and make it work. They have stuck with each other through hard times, including the year when Max's father lost his job forcing Max's family to lose their house and move. This experience proved unsettling for Max. He began to struggle academically and seemed to draw away from some classmates - but not Luca or Joseph. In fact, Max's troubles brought them closer.

Recently Max has been spending more and more time online playing Fortnite. He enjoys the escape from real life that it offers, and he feels a sense of belonging in the community of gamers who have bonded through shared campaigns and online "trash talking." Max's online activities, however, are spilling over into his interactions at school: he has become more aggressive in his interactions with peers and regularly talks over classmates when they are speaking. Worst of all, his conversation has come to include a constant stream of profanity. His unfiltered remarks are not targeted at any person or identity in particular; on the contrary, he slides between so many offensive terms that he has managed to alienate people from several different groups. As a result, Max, who was never popular, is now actively looked down on by most of those in his grade. Even Joseph has started avoiding Max since he does not want to be associated with his offensive behavior and is, frankly, tired of dealing with it himself. At this point, Luca is the only one left who voluntarily associates with Max at school.

Luca can't decide what to do. If he abandons Max, he fears that Max will increasingly turn to this online community for support: the more isolated Max feels at school, the more he will seek acceptance online. But if Luca stays close to Max, Luca risks alienating other friends, especially Joseph. Should Luca stick by Max as always and hope that Max will eventually grow out of his profanity problem? Or should Luca pull away from Max too, both to preserve his other friendships?

### **Match Question**

1. At what point should Luca end his friendship with Max? Why?
2. Are we free to end a friendship whenever we want to? Is Luca?
3. Who in Max's life has an obligation to help him correct his problematic behavior?

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Should we treat children who engage in offensive behavior differently than we treat adults?
2. What obligations do friends have to each other when relationships change?
3. Are there ever situations when ending a friendship is the most caring thing to do?
4. How can our definition of friendship help us make choices about our relationships?