

Reality Check: Sometimes There Are No Do-Overs

Today's Decisions Can Have Legal and Long-Term Consequences

1. **AGE.** Because I'm 18, if I'm convicted of a federal crime, a lot of factors come into play and it won't, necessarily, have an impact on the rest of my life.

FALSE

A felony conviction affects many important civil rights: You lose the right to vote, the right to hold public office, the right to serve on a jury, and the right to possess any type of firearm. In addition, if you are not a U.S. citizen, you may be subject to deportation or exclusion from the United States. A conviction can affect your ability to become a U.S. citizen. There are also collateral consequences that can affect your driving privileges and certain employment and business opportunities. You can be barred from professional licenses in nursing, transportation or teaching. You can be denied access to government benefits, student loans, or public housing.

2. **PARTYING.** My parents know that my friends and I are going to drink, and they want to keep us off the road, so they buy the beer and we get together at our house, where my parents can keep an eye on us. If the party gets busted, anyone who is underage is breaking the law, but my parents won't get charged. Of course, they're over the legal age and they won't be drinking because they are driving some kids home.

FALSE

Parents may be charged with a criminal offense, for example, contributing to the delinquency of a minor or hosting an "open house" party.

3. **DRIVING.** My friends and I have been driving for two years. One of my friends has never been caught speeding and she's never had an accident. But she's got a lot of unpaid parking tickets stuffed in her glove compartment. I keep telling her that if she ever gets stopped, they could take her license.

TRUE

Her license may be suspended until the tickets are paid, and her car may be impounded.

4. **AGE.** When I go to a bar, I use the fake I.D. I bought it on the Internet. I've heard that the site could be part of a national ring, but I'm not going to get caught. Besides, if I do, the worst that will happen is that they'll take my I.D. and kick me out of the bar.

FALSE

Possession of a fake ID is a third-degree felony in some states. Use of another person's identifying information is a federal offense of aggravated identity theft that may carry 24 months in federal prison.

5. **DRUGS.** If I'm hiking in Colorado, where pot is legal, and my friends bring some back to our home state where it's not legal, they could end up in federal court, if they're caught with it.

TRUE

The federal government and most states prohibit the possession of marijuana. Transporting marijuana across state lines is a federal offense.

6. **SPORTS.** I order nutritional supplements off the Internet that I get in the mail. I use them to improve my athletic performance. I need every edge I can get to win a college scholarship. These are pharmaceuticals and not illegal drugs that I'm getting from some street dealer, so I'm okay.

FALSE

The distribution and transport of a controlled substance is a serious criminal offense. Depending on the quantity of the controlled substance, there may be mandatory minimum penalties that can be imposed. A controlled substance includes any anabolic steroid, narcotic, hallucinogenic, stimulant or depressant drug.

7. **AGE.** If I ever did get convicted of something in federal court, because of my age, I'd get probation. My older brother says that means I might not be able to travel with my tennis team.

TRUE

For most federal offenses, probation or supervised release is mandatory and limits your ability to travel, restricts employment opportunities. Supervision is conducted on a weekly basis and may be conducted over the course of several years.

8. **SEXTING.** My buddies on the football team were joking around in the locker room after a big win. One of the guys popped open a bottle of sparkling cider that looked like champagne. He dropped his towel while he was guzzling from the bottle on his way into the shower. It was hysterical so, when he turned his back, I captured some video on my phone. I sent it to the other guys on the team who weren't in the showers at the time. I thought it was a harmless moment that we'll laugh about at our high school reunion, some day. The coach says we could be in big trouble.

TRUE

It is a serious federal crime to create or distribute child pornography, which would include pictures like this. Even though it was consensual and done as a joke, it's still a crime.

9. **SCHOOL.** My classmates and I were sitting in first period when our teacher was called to the office for an emergency. Before he left, we noticed that he was in the middle of posting an announcement on the class website. We thought it would be funny to change the message and post it. I kept watch while my friends posted a music video and a message that our class will be cancelled next week. I figured he'd have a good laugh and just delete it later.

FALSE

Accessing the computer of a school or a business is illegal hacking. As the lookout, you are still in trouble. Helping someone else commit a crime is called aiding and abetting. Legally, you are considered just as responsible as the person who did it.

10. **DRIVING.** A friend of mine was a witness to a car wreck and now she must testify before a grand jury. She's not sure that she's willing to tell the whole truth because it implicates her and could jeopardize her scholarship. The details are not that important because she's not the one on trial. Since the proceedings aren't in court, the standard of "telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" doesn't apply.

FALSE

Lying while under oath may result in a federal conviction for false declarations before a grand jury, otherwise known as perjury, which carries with it a maximum penalty of up to five years imprisonment.