

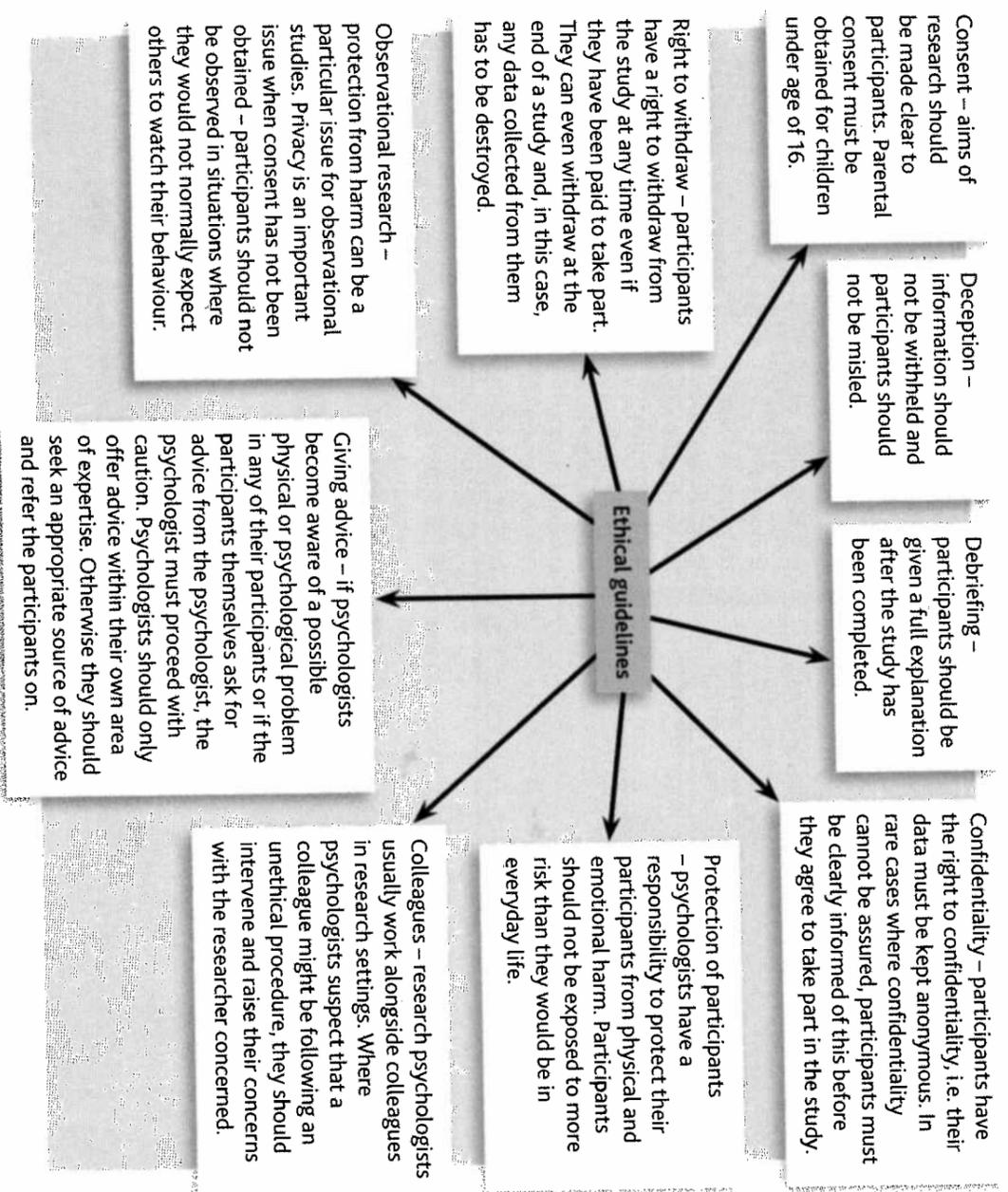
## The British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Ethics

The BPS is the professional organisation responsible for promoting ethical behaviour in the UK and it has developed a set of ethical principles designed to protect the public from harm and to maintain the integrity of British psychologists.

For the up-to-date version of the Code, see the BPS website ([www.bps.org.uk](http://www.bps.org.uk)).

You will not need to know every detail set out in the Code for the exam but you will need to be aware of some of the major ethical guidelines.

### Ethical guideline categories



**AQA Examiner's tip**  
Where deception has been deemed necessary and acceptable, debriefing is especially important but do not make the mistake of thinking that debriefing alone makes deception acceptable.

These are guidelines not laws, and there are instances where psychologists cannot adhere to them if they want to carry out meaningful research, e.g. it can be difficult to gain informed consent from participants in certain observational studies and field experiments. Deception is sometimes necessary to avoid demand characteristics. Sometimes this can be relatively harmless and easily dealt with by good debriefing, e.g. some of Loftus' EWT studies. Sometimes, deception leads to much more serious problems, e.g. Milgram's obedience study. Psychologists always have to

weigh up the risks and benefits of any research they carry out. One of the main checks is the need for them to publish their work in reputable journals. Research reports are rigorously scrutinised and journal editors will not publish studies where ethical guidelines have been ignored unless there is a very good reason.

## Ethical issues and ways in which psychologists deal with them

There are two main ways of dealing with ethical issues in psychological research:

- Self-regulate using the BPS Code of Ethics
- Use ethics committees.

**AQA Examiner's tip**  
You might be given a scenario and asked to identify an ethical issue arising from it. Make sure that the issue is relevant to the scenario and that you can explain why it is an issue. You may also be asked how a researcher may deal with the issue, so make sure that you choose an issue for which you can provide a solution.

Ethical issue	Why is it an issue?	Methods for dealing with it
Deception	Participants may be misled about the nature of the research. It prevents them from making an informed decision about taking part. It might make people distrustful of psychologists.	Debriefing Retrospective informed consent
Informed consent	If participants are not given all of the facts before agreeing to take part in a study, they may find themselves taking part against their wishes. It might make people distrustful of psychologists.	Prior general consent Presumptive consent For children, gaining consent of parents or those <i>in loco parentis</i> (e.g. headteacher)
Protection from harm	Participants have a right to be protected from any physical or emotional harm. The participants should leave the study in the same state as they entered it. Any harm could have long-lasting effects.	Reminding participants throughout of their right to withdraw Terminating any research which appears to be causing distress Debriefing Offering advice/support

### Terminology

Types of consent:

- Prior general consent** involves obtaining a general agreement to participate in a study that involves deception at some time in the future. In later studies, where they participate, it is then assumed that they will not object to being deceived.
- Presumptive consent** involves taking a random sample of the population and introducing them to the research, including any deception involved. If they agree that they would still have given their consent to take part, it is assumed that other people in the general population would also agree.
- Retrospective consent**: once the true nature of the research has been revealed, participants are given the right to withdraw their data.