

# THE GOLDEN RULE

**MANY HUMANISTS BELIEVE THE GOLDEN RULE CAN HELP US TO DECIDE WHAT WE SHOULD DO.**

**'Treat other people as you'd want to be treated in their situation.'**

**'Do not treat others in a way you would not like to be treated yourself.'**

The Golden Rule promotes kindness and care for those in difficulty, because this is what we would want in their situation. It encourages fairness, equality, and respect for other people. It discourages lying, bullying, cruelty, and theft, because no one wants to suffer in this way.

The Golden Rule has appeared independently in many places around the world and throughout history. Many humanists believe this is because it evolved naturally from the fact that we are social animals who live together in communities and who can imagine each other's feelings. Treating others well helped social groups to build trust, to work together, and to survive.



'Imagining yourself on the receiving end of your own behaviour is a good way to decide whether you're doing what you think is right or wrong.'

**NATALIE HAYNES,**  
author



## CRITICISMS AND RESPONSES

The Golden Rule has been criticised for not giving enough information about exactly what we should do. Many humanists accept that the Golden Rule is not perfect (all rules have problems). Often there are no simple answers to the question of what we should do. However, many believe it is a good place to start from and that it is helpful in many situations.

Some say we should not treat other people the way we would like to be treated because other people may not like the same things as us. They might not share our tastes and desires. We might prefer chocolate; they might prefer cheese. We might be excited by danger; they might be afraid.

However, another way to think about the Golden Rule is, instead of thinking about our own specific likes and dislikes, to think about our general desire to be happy and avoid pain, to have our wishes taken into account and our fears avoided. We should not just think about what we would want, but try to imagine we were the other person, with their tastes and preferences, and think about how they would like to be treated.



I should not buy my friend salt and vinegar crisps because I like salt and vinegar crisps. I should buy her whichever flavour of crisps *she* likes, because I would like to be bought the flavour of crisps I like.