

GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING DECEPTION

Deliberate deception of subjects should occur only if the investigator has determined that withholding complete, accurate information about the nature of the study is necessary to ensure valid results. Withholding information cannot be used as a means to secure the participation of subjects in research.

If the investigator has made this determination, then the following concerns need to be addressed in the application for approval for the use of human subjects, either in the description of the study, or as an explanation that will be given to the subjects after participating:

1. Sufficient information to understand why deception is needed.
2. How the potential benefits justify the use of deception.
3. Whether the debriefing will be oral or in writing, and when it will take place. If it will be written, subjects need to be provided with the opportunity to discuss the study after the debriefing.

Although debriefing of subjects can be used in any study where the researcher desires to provide subjects with additional information or support after participation is completed, it is especially important when the research involves deception. Minimally, the debriefing should include the following:

- a. The real nature of the study, the fact that deception occurred, and clarification of any misconceptions that have arisen as a result of the deception.
- b. The reason(s) the investigator felt deception to be necessary.
- c. The extent of the deception (e.g., what the subjects were led to believe, as contrasted with reality).
- d. An offer for subjects to be able to withdraw their data. This compensates for lack of prospective informed consent by giving subjects opportunity to control retrospectively whether their data are included in deceptive research

The critical concern is for the welfare of the subjects, so it is the responsibility of the investigator to ensure there are no unaddressed negative consequences of the deception.

When the subjects of the study are minors, the “debriefing” session will need to be suitable for the age group of the minors. In some cases, where very young children are involved, it may be advisable for the investigator to involve a parent (or guardian) in the debriefing session. Depending on the nature of the deception, it may be in the best interests of the minor to allow the deception to remain intact. The investigator should make this determination and provide the IRB with an explanation of why debriefing will or will not occur and, if it will, the substance of the information that will be provided using age-appropriate language.