ABSOLUTISM
(Ethical Absolutism)

“ONE TRUTH”
There is a universal truth that applies across people and situations. There is an absolute standard against which right and wrong can always be judged. There is one correct perspective (or “focus”) about what is right and it should be applied consistently.

QUESTIONS?
An absolutist may ask:

What is the definitive truth?
How can I apply this universal truth?
How can we help others to see the right way of doing things?

SAYINGS
Associated with this perspective:

“The truth is out there”
“The definitive truth”
“Only one right way”
“One path to the truth”
RIGIDITY. It can be dangerous to believe in one universally accepted perspective, standard or approach that is better than all others in all situations, cultures and contexts. There seem to be times when a few valuable approaches each have a piece of the truth. If we only follow one standard of what is right, that standard may not always be correct.

“Never lie” sounds like a good universal standard, but imagine that you have a friend who is hiding from an aggressive drunk person who is trying to assault them. You know where your friend is hiding, but the drunk person does not know that. The drunk person is going in the direction of your friend’s hiding place and asks you where your friend is hiding. It seems reasonable to lie to stop them from finding your friend.

CONCLUSION
Absolutism highlights a valuable lesson: there are some things that are clearly and consistently right or wrong (e.g. child abuse). However, it seems that more than just one perspective (or “focus”) has at least part of the truth. Different perspectives can be held in an absolutist way (e.g. “X is the only worthwhile focus”), therefore it is important to remember the pros and cons of absolutism as they apply to different focus areas. WeTake5.com suggests considering a few well-respected focus areas when deciding what is right (see Pluralism and the 5Cs: Character, Code, Consequences, Care and Consult).