

Teaching Decision-Making Skills

Most of us make a lot of our decisions with very little thought. Right? Does that always work for you? Well, it certainly doesn't work for children with developmental disabilities, especially when they have to make big decisions. Help your child avoid disastrous consequences by teaching them how to make the right decisions.

Note: It will take more than one session to complete this activity. Afterward, keep this activity handy so you can refer to it whenever your child is having a hard time making a big decision.

A Seven-Step Approach to Making Decisions

Tell your child that we all make lots and lots of decisions every day. We make decisions about what to wear, what to eat, what we are going to do in the evening. Ask your child to name some of the decisions they make every day.

Continue by saying that many decisions feel very easy. You feel like wearing shorts? Then you pick out a pair of shorts and put them on. You feel like watching TV? Then you turn it on to see if there's anything worth watching. Some decisions are harder because they are BIGGER... like should I take that job at the supermarket, should I tell my friend that I am mad at her, or should I ask that person out on a date.

Tell your child that when we have to make BIGGER decisions, it can be helpful to break the decision-making process into small steps.

Turn to the "Making Decisions" information sheet (see below) and work through all seven steps using the following scenario (write the scenario and complete Steps 3-7 on a piece of paper, if appropriate):

Amy really wants a new cell phone. Unfortunately, the one she wants costs \$500, and she only has \$300. She wonders how she'll get the rest of the money.

Step 1: The first thing Amy should do is relax.

Step 2: Now it's time for Amy to give herself some confidence.

Step 3: Identify the problem... Amy doesn't have enough money to buy the phone.

Step 4: Come up with a list of possible solutions. [Your solutions may include the following:]

1. Save her money until she's got enough.
2. Borrow money from her parents or friends.
3. Buy a cheaper phone.

Step 5: Figure out the positive and negative consequences of each solution.

1. Save her money until she's got enough.

Positive consequences: Amy will feel proud about her accomplishment; she'll get the phone she really wants.

Negative consequences: Amy has to wait.

2. Borrow money from her parents or friends.

Positive consequences: Amy will get the phone right away; she'll get the phone she really wants.

Negative consequences: Amy won't feel independent; parents or friends may say "no."

3. Buy a cheaper phone.

Positive consequences: Amy will get the phone right away.

Negative consequences: Amy won't get the phone she really wants.

Step 6: If you were Amy, what would be important to you...

...getting the phone you really want?

...getting the phone right away?

...not borrowing money?

After choosing what's important, cross out solutions that don't apply.

Step 7: Make the decision.

For emphasis, circle the decision on your piece of paper.

Afterward, ask your child the following questions:

Did we come up with a good solution? Why?

Can you think of a situation in your own life where you might be able to use this seven-step method? [If your child offers up a suitable situation or if you remind them of one, use the method to tackle their problem. Write scenario and steps on a piece of paper. After choosing what's important in Step 6, cross out solutions that don't apply before moving on to Step 7.]

Practice Time

Look below and you'll find three additional scenarios that you can use with your child.

Wrap-Up

Ask your child the following questions:

Why do you think it's good to use these seven steps to make a decision?

Why do you think some decisions are harder to make than others?

It took a while to get through those seven steps, didn't it?

Would you use this method to make all of your decisions?

What kinds of decisions would you use this method for?

When would it be silly to use this method?

Adapted from Lesson 25 in Sexual Violence in Teenage Lives: A Prevention Curriculum by Judy Cyprian, Katherine McLaughlin, and Glenn Quint, Planned Parenthood of Northern New England, 1995

Making Decisions



1. Relax.

Take a deep breath
and let *all* of the air out.



2. Say something positive.

“I can do this. I can deal with this.”
“I can get help if I need it.”

*This gives you confidence and
makes you feel good about yourself.*



3. Identify the problem or situation.

Ask yourself, “What is the problem?”



4. What are your choices?
Think of **all** possible solutions.



5. Come up with all of the consequences for each choice.
List both the **positive** and **negative** consequences.



6. What's important to you?



7. Make the decision.

Decision-Making Worksheet #1

You are walking down the hallway at school when another student pushes you against the wall and calls you names. The student tells you that if you tattle, things will only get worse. This is already the fourth time this week that this has happened.

Step 1: Relax. Take a deep breath and let *all* of the air out.

Step 2: Give yourself confidence.

Step 3: What is the problem?

Step 4: List all of the possible solutions. We give you space for four solutions, but you may have more or fewer than that. Use additional paper, if necessary.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Step 5: For each possible solution, list the positive and negative consequences. Use additional paper, if necessary.

Alternative 1

Positive consequences:

Negative consequences:

Alternative 2

Positive consequences:

Negative consequences:

Alternative 3

Positive consequences:

Negative consequences:

Alternative 4

Positive consequences:

Negative consequences:

Step 6: What's important to you?

Step 7: Make the decision.

Decision-Making Worksheet #2

You've known your best friend ever since you were little kids. You talk about everything and you hang out together all of the time. Lately, you've started to have romantic feelings for this friend. It's very confusing to have these feelings, but it's also very exciting. You wonder what you should do next.

Step 1: Relax. Take a deep breath and let *all* of the air out.

Step 2: Give yourself confidence.

Step 3: What is the problem?

Step 4: List all of the possible solutions. We give you space for four solutions, but you may have more or fewer than that. Use additional paper, if necessary.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Step 5: For each possible solution, list the positive and negative consequences. Use additional paper, if necessary.

Alternative 1

Positive consequences:

Negative consequences:

Alternative 2

Positive consequences:

Negative consequences:

Alternative 3

Positive consequences:

Negative consequences:

Alternative 4

Positive consequences:

Negative consequences:

Step 6: What's important to you?

Step 7: Make the decision.

Decision-Making Worksheet #3

Your parents won't let you go anywhere without them. A group of your friends wants to go bowling on Saturday and they ask you to join them. You ask your parents and they both say "no" because they'll be busy around the house that day.

Step 1: Relax. Take a deep breath and let *all* of the air out.

Step 2: Give yourself confidence.

Step 3: What is the problem?

Step 4: List all of the possible solutions. We give you space for four solutions, but you may have more or fewer than that. Use additional paper, if necessary.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Step 5: For each possible solution, list the positive and negative consequences. Use additional paper, if necessary.

Alternative 1

Positive consequences:

Negative consequences:

Alternative 2

Positive consequences:

Negative consequences:

Alternative 3

Positive consequences:

Negative consequences:

Alternative 4

Positive consequences:

Negative consequences:

Step 6: What's important to you?

Step 7: Make the decision.