

We make decisions all the time. Think about a typical day and all the choices you've made that you may be unaware of. These decisions are made in the moment and your reaction seems so automatic and unimportant. For example, what to eat for breakfast, what to wear to school, should you brush your teeth? Or, do you complete your homework before playing a new game, like your parents had instructed? Maybe you ignore what they said so you can test out the new game anyway. Some decisions seem so minor and insignificant while others present themselves as problems with greater difficulty and could even feel unmanageable. One big decision is whether to drink or use drugs. What other big choices have you had to make? How did you make your decision? Sometimes, you may not know what the right or wrong answer is for you. Certainly, everyone makes poor choices from time to time but because every choice you make comes with consequences good or bad it is helpful to learn some skills that will prepare you for making better decisions. Like learning to play sports or an instrument, decision making is a skill that can be learned.

- **What have been some tough decisions for you to make?**
- **Do you remember how you dealt with those tricky choices?**
- **Were there certain questions you asked yourself, or others?**
- **Why do you think you've made good or poor choices?-What did you get from them?**

## **When Do I Ask for Help?**

Making wise decisions on your own about important issues like alcohol, drugs, smoking or dating can be satisfying, but it can also feel confusing and if peer pressure is added to the process it may be scary to make the decision you really want. It's ok to ask for help when you're struggling to find the best solution to fit your situation. Most people feel flattered when they are asked for their advice or help. Think about it, you are letting someone know how much you trust and value their opinion and relationship because you chose to share something important with them. Ultimately, after asking for help, getting advice or weighing all your options the final decision is in your hands. You control the choice you make but you still may not get the result you want. Read on to see how you can learn to make decisions that you can feel confident about.

## **Navigating Decision Making**

If you were taking a road trip across the United States you would probably want to bring along a map or GPS system to help guide you through unfamiliar areas. Sometimes, being lost in new territory can feel adventurous and a bit rebellious, but without a clear idea of how to get to where you want to go it can also be time consuming and frustrating. Not to mention, you may never find your way. Of course you could always ask someone who was familiar with where you were traveling to join you as the guide. Finding your way through the decision making process can at times seem as intimidating as being on a journey when you're lost and don't know where or how you will arrive at some destination.

You can use the following questions like a map to begin steering your own course through learning how to make confident and wise choices. The next time you are faced with making a difficult decision ask:

1. Are there consequences?-Will I get into trouble?
2. Why do I want to do or say this?
3. Am I being influenced by anyone? Is someone else telling me I should do this? (My friends, parents, teachers, sister/brother etc.)
4. Do I have options?
5. How will my decision affect others?
6. Is this really the best decision for me?
7. Can I wait to answer or decide until tomorrow?
8. If my best friend were trying to make this decision what advice would I give her/him?
9. Will I feel good about myself with this decision?
10. Does this decision go against personal or family values or principles?
11. Do I have all the information I need to make this decision?  
Or, are there things I don't understand?

### Yes, But...

Sometimes there is only one way to look at making a decision or what the right choice would be. Here are some clear situations when there is only one way to see things.

- Someone is about to do something that you know is **illegal**. (Shoplift, bring a gun into school, buy drugs, drive under the influence etc.)
- When you or someone else is in **physical danger**. This includes when someone tells you they are thinking about hurting themselves or suicide.
- When you are about to **violate** the rights of another person
- When what you are about to do goes against what you **believe**.

### Do You Know What You Don't Know? No...?

Gathering information is one of the most important pieces in the decision making process. Have you ever started watching a movie half way through? Initially, it can be puzzling trying to figure out the story or characters until, you've collected enough information. When you have only small bits of a story or even inaccurate information, trying to make a decision it is like walking into a movie theater an hour late for the movie. You want to be prepared and knowledgeable to make the best decision for you. The following tips can guide you when you are seeking information.

- **Get the Facts**-Ask Physicians, Nurses, teachers, parents

You wouldn't ask a smoker about the risks of smoking just like you wouldn't see a foot doctor to clean your teeth. Try to match your questions with an appropriate source. There are plenty of professionals and websites that will give you only the facts so you can make your own decision.

- **Find outside resources**-Library, church, counselors, neighbors, Internet
- **Understand your Values**- do you believe the same things as your parents? How important is religion, money, education, health to them or you. Have you thought about topics like honesty etc?

### Brave Reviews

Don't forget to congratulate yourself for having the courage to make a difficult decision. That's right, go ahead and feel proud about your accomplishment. It is not always easy to make responsible decisions when faced with peer pressure and tempting options. Remind yourself that you have the skills to make tough choices.

## Problem Solving Express

How do you start to tackle something that feels like it's more than you can handle. When we first run into difficulty the solution may seem hidden beneath endless obstacles. The good news is that for every problem there is a solution. The most helpful way to begin to deal with a problem is to break it down into small manageable steps. Problem solving can actually be rewarding especially because it can be as unique as you. Creativity and flexibility allow you to stamp your own style onto a solution best suited for you. Here are the steps:

### 1. What is the problem?

Do you have a clear idea of the problem? Could you write it down? If you identify the problem as "My life stinks" you need to ask yourself what lead you to this conclusion. Does your life suck because you are failing a class? Try to be specific.

### 2. What baby steps can you explore?

It is less discouraging to look at small pieces of a problem. Examine the problem in steps. If the issue seems too big you may feel like giving up before you find a solution. Can you think of any reasons that could lead to failing a class?

### 3. What are some possible solutions?

This part can be really fun because you get to brainstorm for ideas. When you brainstorm you write down all the possible solutions you can think of. Use your knowledge combined with past experiences and throw in a little creativity and you're sure to come up with several solutions. Are there any solutions you can come up with for the above problem of failing a class?

### 4. What are the pros and cons?

For all the ideas for solutions you came up with can you identify which ones would be positive or pro answers and which ones would be negative or con? If you make a list on a piece of paper it will probably become clear to you when one side is larger than the other. You want to pick something from the positive or pro solution side.

### 5. Which solution is the best?

Make your decision for the solution you feel is best for you. If you're still struggling ask for help.

### 6. Will that be for here or to go?

Now you must decide if you will try something new. You should feel proud that you've taken the responsibility to change something that was a problem. The exciting part of problem solving is that if the solution you've chosen isn't effective you can try another.

### 7. How did it all work out?

Assess your decision. Did it work? Why? Why not? How would you make changes for the next time? What went right? Remember all this new information.