

Practice Responsible Decision-Making



When students are able to make responsible decisions, they are better equipped to respond to changes and challenges. They can also make positive choices about how they behave.

It's not always easy for kids to make the right choice. But they can make better decisions when they have the ability to recognize right from wrong, gather relevant facts, evaluate potential options, identify safety concerns, and understand social norms.

Helping your child strengthen decision-making skills fosters personal and academic success—now and in the future.

QuickTips

Benefits of Responsible Decision-Making

The ability to make responsible and ethical decisions benefits students in countless ways. It helps them:

- **Recognize and identify problems.**
- **Understand the different aspects** of challenging situations (ethical, practical and social).
- **Manage the consequences** of decisions.
- **Consider the well-being** of themselves and others.
- **Recognize the role of emotions** in making decisions.
- **Solve problems** in appropriate ways.
- **Reflect on their own power** to change situations.

Talk About Thinking

In order to improve their decision-making skills, children need to consider how they think. Tell your child that good thinkers:

- **Plan.** They gather information before they act. If they receive new information, they adapt their plans.
- **Draw on past knowledge** to address current problems.
- **Look for other ways** to solve problems if the first way doesn't work.



Role-Play Tricky Situations

Play the “What If?” game to help your child think about challenging situations. Here's how it works:

1. **Write down a list of difficult situations** your child could face. For example, a stranger approaches and asks for help.
2. **Write each situation in the form of a question:** “What if someone you didn't know asked you to help find their lost dog?”
3. **Have your child answer each question.** If you're not happy with a response, say something like, “Can you think of something else you might do?” When your child is out of ideas, discuss your own opinion.

Here are some sample questions:

- **What if you were home alone** and someone called and said, “Are your parents home?”
- **What if you saw a group of kids teasing** someone?
- **What if a classmate asked** to copy your assignment?

Give Your Child Practice

The best way for children to learn how to make responsible choices is through practice. Young children can decide between two options for lunch. Older kids can have a wider range of choices.

You'll still set the boundaries. For example, your child can decide which assignment to start first, but your child can't decide to watch TV while doing it.

Of course, your child will make some mistakes. That's the time to sit down and talk about what worked and what didn't. Ask, "What would you do differently next time?"

With practice, your child will learn to make good choices—and know what to do when decisions don't work out.



Share a Five-Step Process

Go through these five steps with your child for making decisions:

1. **Define the issue.** Have your child describe the situation.
2. **Brainstorm options.** Have your child list all possible choices. There may be more than two.
3. **Evaluate options.** Help your child consider the pros and cons of each option. Your child should keep your family's values in mind.
4. **Make a decision.** It's time for your child to try out the option that seems best.
5. **Review.** How is the choice working? Is it helping your child solve the problem or reach the goal? If yes, great! If not, it's time go back to step three.

Think Through Problems

Kids learn more from decisions they make for themselves. So guide your child's thinking, rather than offering solutions. Here's how:

- 1 **Listen to your child.** What is the problem?



- 2 **Ask for details.** Get your child to keep talking about the situation. Use phrases like, "Tell me more" and "I'm listening," to encourage your child to continue talking.

- 3 **Restate the problem** back to your child in question form: "You're not sure what to do about your science project?"



- 4 **Wait quietly** for your child to think about your question. Often children will begin to come up with solutions.

- 5 **Ask if your child would like** help coming up with options to solve the problem.



- 6 **Offer suggestions** in the form of questions, such as, "How would you feel about ... ?" Or, "Would you consider ... ?" This leaves responsibility for the decision with your child.

Turn Mistakes Into Lessons

Your child has made a poor decision. To learn from it, your child should:

- **Admit it.** Don't let your child blame others. "I hit my siblings because they came in my room without knocking."
- **Rethink.** What could your child have done differently? "I should have asked them politely to leave."
- **Make amends.** Did your child's mistake hurt another person? If so, it's important to apologize.
- **Prevent a recurrence.** How can your child avoid making the same mistake again? "I can take 10 deep breaths when someone makes me mad."

Focus on Ethics

Just telling children they need to learn to choose to do the right thing isn't enough. Ask your child to think of an ethical choice that might come up. Then have your child put a decision through this five-question test:

1. **Am I making this choice** with the hope that no one will find out?
2. **What will I think** about my choice in a month? In a year?
3. **How could my choice affect others?** Would I want them to do the same to me?
4. **If [someone I admire] were in the same situation,** what would they do?
5. **If everyone did** what I'm about to do, would I want to live in the world shaped by that decision?