

Supporting children's decision making skills

Suggestions for parents and carers

Learning to make good decisions helps children become more independent and responsible. A good decision is one that, on balance, is most likely to lead to a positive outcome for everyone concerned. Learning to consider the situation carefully and weigh up the options before coming to a decision helps children make better decisions. It also helps them to understand and take into account others' views when making decisions that affect them.

How you can help:

- **Allow children to practise making choices**

Giving children opportunities to make choices helps to build their sense of responsibility as well as their decision making skills. It is important that the choice really is theirs, so provide options that you will be happy with no matter which they choose. Showing interest in their choice helps to reinforce that you see their decisions as important.

- **Talk about everyday decisions**

Involve children in your own decision making. For example, you might say, "I'm trying to decide whether to take up a sport to get fit or go to a dance class. Which do you think I should do?" Talk through the advantages and disadvantages of each suggestion so your child can learn how to thoughtfully evaluate different options.

- **Support children to use decision making steps**

As children develop their skills for thinking through decisions, teach them the steps of decision making and show them how to use them effectively. Decision making steps: 1) Identify the decision to be made, 2) Think of options, 3) Evaluate the options and choose the best one, and 4) Put your choice into action and check how it works.

- **Ask questions that promote thoughtful decisions**

"What do you like about that?" "What makes this the best option?" "How would this work?" "Can you think of any reasons why...?" Asking questions that prompt children to think through their reasons for choosing a particular option helps them learn how to evaluate options and think through consequences.

- **Encourage children to set achievable goals**

Setting their own goals to work towards encourages children to plan and think ahead. It helps them

understand the link between making decisions and taking action. Appropriate goals for children to choose include developing a new skill (e.g., learning to play chess, learning to swim), improving performance in school work or in an area of particular interest (e.g., learning to play a particular piece of music or to master a difficult skill in sport), or earning pocket money to save for something special. It is important that the goals set are achievable and motivating for the child. In addition, the steps needed to reach goals need to be definite, clear and small enough for the child to manage. Providing praise and acknowledgment for small steps of progress supports children to meet their goals.

- **When children make poor decisions...**

- Check your expectations. Are the decisions you want them to make appropriate for their age and ability? Do children understand what they need to think about to make an effective decision? Are the options clear? If not, then you may be expecting too much and need to make the task simpler or take charge of the decision yourself.
- Everyone makes mistakes sometimes. Allowing children to experience the consequences of their decisions can provide useful lessons in responsibility. It is easier for children to accept difficult or disappointing consequences when they feel supported and cared for as they learn to correct their mistakes.
- Talk through good and poor decisions. Children learn best when they are calmly helped to think through the outcomes of their decisions and supported in making a better choice next time. Helping them to accept responsibility for mistakes and plan how to improve the situation teaches skills for more effective decision making.

This resource is part of the KidsMatter Primary initiative. We welcome your feedback at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



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