

Option A or Option B: The Steps of the Decision Making Process

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Goal:

You will be able to apply the decision making process to personal or family situations.

Objectives:

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

- Identify the steps of the decision making process
- Identify factors that influence decision making
- Apply the decision making process when making decisions.

Introduction:

We make hundreds of decisions every day. These decisions can be as routine as when to get out of bed, what to eat for lunch, or when to exercise, or decisions can be as significant as what career to pursue or where to live. Whether making a decision about something fairly routine or a major life event, making good decisions takes time, practice, and conscious thought.

Definition of Decision Making

Decision making is the process of choosing what to do by considering the possible consequences of different choices (Brockman & Russell, 2009; Walker, 2001a). The decision making process is a tool that can help you or your family members reach goals, gain greater control

over your life, and help you be more satisfied with the quality of your life (Walker, 2001b).

Factors Influencing Decision Making

Making decisions can be complex because of the large amount of factors that influence the decision making process (Brockman & Russell, 2009). Some factors are specific to you as an individual such as your values, goals, and priorities. Other factors are external such as cultural and community values, religion, media influences, peers, friends, and family. When making decisions it is important to understand how these influences impact the process.

Goal setting is important to the decision making process because it can help determine options and set a course of action. Specifically, goals are the end result that an individual, family, or community works toward (Walker, 2001). Goals can be divided into short-term and long-term. Short-term goals are defined as something you hope to achieve within six months, while long-term goals are something you hope to achieve in a time period longer than six months. An example of a short-term goal is organizing your home office space, and an example of a long-term goal is saving money for a new car.

Personal values also impact decision making. Values are something you believe that impacts your behavior. Examples of values include honesty, education, good health, or financial security. Values help determine

options and consequences of options in the decision making process. For example, if you highly value financial security, you will make decisions that will include having adequate savings and/or keeping expenses to a minimum.

Steps of the Decision Making Process

1. **State the problem or situation.** The decision making process begins with a situation or problem to be addressed or solved. It can be helpful to write down the problem.
2. **Consider your goals and values.** The goals you set for yourself are influenced by your values. Knowing your values and goals will help you determine what is desired.
3. **Determine the options.** Look for as many options as possible to solve your problem or situation. Be creative as you think about options. The more options you think of, the more likely it is that you will find a solution that fits your situation. When thinking about options, seek out information from friends, family, and reliable information sources.
4. **Consider the consequences or list the pros and the cons of each option.** In this step it is helpful to think about the positive and negative outcomes of doing each option. To help you determine the pros and cons of each option, consider your personal goals and values and what resources, such as time, money, or knowledge, will be needed. Then, list the pros and cons of each option.
5. **Select the best option.** Based on the positive and negative consequences of each alternative, select the option that best fits your goals, values, and available resources.
6. **Act upon the decision.** After making a decision it is important to put that decision into action. It can be helpful to create action steps listing how you plan to carry out your decision.
7. **Accept responsibility.** When you make a decision it is important to accept responsibility for that decision and the consequences that are associated with it.
8. **Evaluate the results.** The last step of the process is to analyze the results or outcomes of your decision. This analysis will help you determine the effectiveness of the decision making process.

Source: Steps of the Decision Making Process adapted from: *Make up Your Mind—Improving Your Decision Making Skills*, University of Florida IFAS Extension.

Helping Others Make Decisions

Making good decisions is important not only for you but for your family. Helping others learn to make good decisions is an important life skill you can teach. For example, helping a young child make a decision about eating fruits and vegetables gives them practice in making decisions. The more often young people engage in the steps of the decision making process, the better they will be at using them.

Here are some tips for helping young children and youth use the decision making process:

- Practice making decisions in situations they encounter daily, such as what to eat for school lunch.
- Make decisions, using the process, as a family. For example, decide where to go for vacation or what gift to give a grandparent for their birthday.
- Share with children how you use the decision making process in your life and how you evaluate your decisions.
- Have your child or family member set short-term and long term goals to help the decision making process.
- Discuss values and talk about how they can influence how one makes decisions.

Conclusion:

Making decisions is a part of daily living. Using the decision making process can help individuals and families reach goals, use resources wisely, and contribute to a healthy lifestyle.

Resources:

You can learn more about the decision making process discussed in this lesson in the following materials.

Brockman, M.S., & Russell, S.T. (2009). *Decision-making/reasoning skills*. Building Partnerships for Youth: National 4-H Council and the University of Arizona

Walker, K. (2001a). *Decision Making*, K-State Research and Extension, Manhattan, KS

Walker, K. (2001b). *Goal Setting*. K-State Research and Extension, Manhattan, KS

Walker, K., Torres, Nayda, Turner, J. (2006). *Make up Your Mind—Improving Your Decision Making Skills*. University of Florida IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL

Option A or Option B: The Steps of the Decision Making Process Decision Making Process Worksheet

1. State the problem or situation.
2. Consider your goals and values.
3. Determine the options.
4. Consider the consequences or list the pros and the cons of each option.
5. Select the best option.
6. Act upon the decision.
7. Accept responsibility.
8. Evaluate the results.

Steps of the decision making process adapted from: *Make up Your Mind—Improving Your Decision Making Skills*, University of Florida IFAS Extension.



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