

# MAKING DECISIONS— BIG AND SMALL



## A G E N D A

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### Objectives

Students will recognize that the importance of a decision is determined by its consequences.

Students will identify factors that influence the decisions they make.

Students will recognize and use their power to make decisions—even when the decisions are difficult.

### Materials Needed

- A pair of socks rolled into a ball (Part I)
- One copy of the “Hot or Cold?” activity sheet (#1) (Part II)

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**Starter (3 minutes)**

Read aloud the following paragraph. Ask students to keep count of the decisions you made as you prepared to leave your house for school today:

The alarm went off this morning and I pushed the snooze button (1). Ten minutes later, I got out of bed (2) and took a shower (3). Then I brushed my teeth (4). For breakfast, I had a glass of juice (5) and a bowl of cereal (6) with bananas (7). I put on these clothes (8) and my black shoes (9). But I changed my shoes (10) before I left the house because I wanted to wear a different pair instead.

Ask various students how many decisions they counted. If students disagree on the number, read the paragraph again, this time marking the count, one by one, as you read. Afterward, say, “It’s pretty amazing, isn’t it? I made at least 10 decisions before I left the house this morning. Some were small and I didn’t think about them much. Some were more important and took more thought. Today, we’re going to look at the types of decisions you make.”

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**Part I Snap Decisions (20 minutes)**

*Purpose:* Students begin to understand that the importance of a decision is determined by its consequences.

**1. STUDENTS PARTICIPATE IN AN ACTIVITY IN WHICH THEY MAKE SNAP DECISIONS.**

Explain to students that they are going to play a game to prompt their thinking about how they make decisions. Tell them that you will toss a ball of socks to a student while asking a question. The student must catch the ball, and then throw it back to you while answering the question.

Begin the game, asking questions that increase in difficulty like the ones below. If students hesitate in tossing the ball back to you, urge them to return it quickly with their answer. Keep the game moving, even if students don’t completely answer the questions.

- On which wrist would you wear a watch or a bracelet?
- Did you choose to wear white, black, or colored socks today?
- What will you do after school today?
- If you were going to see a movie tonight, what movie would you see?
- You have to finish reading a book by next Monday. When will you do it?
- If you found money by your locker, would you keep it and not tell anyone, or would you try to find out who dropped it?

**2. STUDENTS EVALUATE THEIR DECISIONS.**

To prompt a discussion about the varying degrees of difficulty in making decisions, ask students if it seemed harder to answer some questions than

others. Have them identify which questions seemed easy (*the first two*), which seemed more difficult (*the middle two*), and which seemed the most difficult (*the last two*). Challenge them to explain why.

### 3. STUDENTS EXAMINE THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSEQUENCES.

Through discussion, guide students to realize that some decisions are fairly easy to make because they involve personal preferences—the color of the socks they put on today, for example—and have no real consequences. These types of decisions are not worth worrying about.

Write the word “consequences” on the board, and ask students to explain what this word means to them. (*Students should respond: the result or outcome of an action; what happens because of something else.*) If students have difficulty verbalizing a definition, have them use the word in a sentence.

Have students consider why some decisions might be more difficult to make than others. Offer students an example to prompt their thinking. Say, “Imagine that you go to after-school tutoring to improve your grades in a subject you’re weak in. What might be the consequences of skipping this tutoring?” (*Students might respond: poor grades, more time to spend at home or with friends, no improvement in subject.*)

Explain that most decisions have both positive and negative consequences. This is why some decisions are more difficult than others.

Next, ask students to consider why some decisions might be very difficult to make. Ask them what they would do if they found money by their lockers. Affirm responses that point out that this decision could have many complicated consequences and require more time to be thought through. Assure students that they will talk more about consequences in later lessons.

Close the discussion by reminding students that they make many, many decisions every day. Point out that it’s important to think about how we make some of those decisions. Tell students that in addition to looking at the consequences of the decisions we make, we also need to look at other factors that influence our decisions.

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## Part II Hot or Cold? (10 minutes)

*Purpose:* Students identify factors that influence the decisions they make.

### 1. STUDENTS BRAINSTORM A LIST OF FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THEIR DECISIONS.

Have the class brainstorm a list of factors that can influence, or affect, the decisions they make every day. (*Students might respond: parents, friends, school, laws, television, etc.*) Write student responses on the board.

Remind students of the rules of brainstorming: Begin by suggesting and writing down as many responses as possible. Afterward, review the list and identify those influences that students consider to be the strongest in their lives.

## 2. STUDENTS READ A STORY AND IDENTIFY THE DECISION MAKERS IN IT.

Distribute copies of the “Hot or Cold?” activity sheet (#1). Explain to students that they are going to read a story. After each part of the story, they are to write the word “hot” in the blank if Chris, the person in the story, makes a decision for herself. They are to write “cold” in the blank if her decision is influenced by what someone else says.

Call on different volunteers to read the parts of the story. After each part, allow students a few seconds to fill in the blanks. Afterward, have them share their answers.

## 3. STUDENTS RECALL THAT THEY HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE DECISIONS.

Write the following sentence on the board: “Personal power lies in the choices you make.” Ask students if they recall this key point from “Lesson 6: Developing Personal Power” of *Confidence Building*. Have them identify who is responsible for the choices they make. Lead them to recognize that though many factors may influence them, they have the power to make their decisions. Conclude by making the following points:

- Just like Chris in the story, you will make different decisions for different reasons.
- The important thing is to understand why you make the decisions you make, so that you can be sure to make the ones you want.
- When making decisions, remember to think about your goals, values, strengths, skills, likes, and dislikes.

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## Part III Dear Source (15 minutes)

*Purpose:* In giving advice to others, students recognize that they always have the power to make decisions—even when the decisions are difficult.

### 1. STUDENTS WRITE ABOUT A DIFFICULT DECISION.

Tell students to think about a tough decision they must make, one they have already made, or one that someone they know must make. Explain that they will write an anonymous letter asking for advice to a fictitious newspaper columnist called “the Source.” Tell students to sign their letters, but not with their real names.

Give students time to write their letters. If students need prompting, you might give a few examples such as the following:

- You have a crush on your best friend’s boyfriend/girlfriend.

- The grades that you have earned in science are low, but you really want to be a doctor.
- You want to join a certain sports team or after-school activity, but none of your friends are on the team and everyone hangs out together at the same time that practice is held.
- Your friends, whom you want to impress, are planning to draw graffiti on a wall at the park near your house. They want you to help.
- One of your parents must make a decision about a new job. It could mean that your family would have to move to a different state.

## 2. STUDENTS OFFER ADVICE ABOUT MAKING DECISIONS.

Collect all of the letters, row by row; then, redistribute them so that students will not get their own letters. Tell students to read the letters and, as “the Source,” to write a response on the back of the paper. Encourage students to give reasons for their advice.

## 3. STUDENTS SHARE LETTERS AND REPLIES WITH THE CLASS.

Invite as many students as possible to read aloud their own letters and responses for the remainder of the class session. Ask questions, make observations, or invite responses from others in the class as appropriate.

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## Conclusion (2 minutes)

Ask students if it is easier to make decisions for others or for themselves. Lead them to recognize that it is often easier to make decisions for others than for themselves. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- The importance of a decision is determined by its consequences.
- Many factors may influence your decisions, but you are the one who makes them.
- You have the power to make decisions, so make ones that are right for you.

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## Questions for Assessment

1. Keep a list of all the decisions you make from the time you leave school until you go to bed. When the list is complete, mark each decision “hot” if you made the decision for yourself, or “cold” if someone influenced your decision.
2. Explain the difference between a small decision and a big decision. Why is it important to give more thought to a big decision?
3. Give an example of a big decision you have made. Explain why you made this decision, what its consequences were, and what you would or would not choose to do differently if you had the chance.

## LESSON EXTENSIONS

**Extension:** Using Quotations

**Quote:** “A man’s judgment is best when he can forget himself and any reputation he may have acquired and can concentrate wholly on making the right decisions.”—Adm. Raymond A. Spruance

**Activity:** Have students give examples of how the desire to protect their reputation can influence the decisions they make.

**Extension:** Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

**Activity:** Have students choose children’s picture books in which a main character has to make a choice.

Have students read the books they chose to the class, a younger sibling, or a student from a lower grade. Discuss what made the characters act as they did.

**Extension:** Writing in Your Journal

**Activity:** Have students write about a decision they are proud (or not proud) of. Have them describe how they made the decision, whether making the decision was difficult, and what consequences it had. Tell students that they will share their work.

Have students read from their journals in small groups. Encourage students to practice active listening by asking questions and summarizing what they’ve heard.

**Extension:** Additional Resources

**Activity:** Have students read selections from *SOS: Stressed Out Students’ Guide to Handling Peer Pressure* by Lisa Medoff. (This book deals with certain topics that may be sensitive issues for your students. Please make the selections carefully.)

Discuss what students read in the book. Talk about peer pressure as an element in decision making.

**Extension:** Homework

**Activity:** Have students keep a list of all the decisions they make during the day. (Tell them they can stop at 50 if they get tired.) When they are finished, students should rank the consequences of each decision on a scale of one to three, with one indicating an unimportant consequence.

Have students share their findings in small groups. Does the importance placed on particular types of decisions vary from person to person?

**Extension:** Additional Resources

**Activity:** Have students read selected chapters from *Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff...and It’s All Small Stuff* by Richard Carlson. This book provides strategies for keeping problems in their proper perspectives.

Have students choose a strategy from the book and create a poster about that strategy. Have them explain the strategy to a classmate.

# HOT OR COLD?

**Fill in the blanks to show who really made each decision. Write “hot” if Chris made the decision herself. Write “cold” if she actually let someone else make it for her.**

1. Hi! My name is Chris, and I got a job at the supermarket on Saturdays. I got a job at this store because you can work in a different area of the store every week.  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. My first week, I worked in the meat department because my friend Sal works there, and he said that all the cool people work there. \_\_\_\_\_
3. But I didn’t know that when you work in the meat department, you have to mop the floor three times a day. Another person I know said she liked working in the produce department, so I started working there the next week. \_\_\_\_\_
4. But you spend a lot of time in produce spraying water on the vegetables to keep them fresh. I get sick pretty easily, and I knew I’d get a cold from all that cold water. So, the next week I moved to the dairy department. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Have you ever noticed how people always read the back of the milk cartons, and then the cartons slip out of their hands, fall to the floor, and break? Well, guess who cleans it up! My friends at the store told me that there wasn’t a lot to do in the cereal department, so the next week I moved there. \_\_\_\_\_
6. But it was so boring! There was really nothing to do, and I like having something to do. I started thinking about how I like working with numbers and talking to people. Now I’m running the cash register. \_\_\_\_\_
7. And I’m not going to change departments next week. \_\_\_\_\_

Answer Key: 1. hot 2. cold 3. cold 4. hot 5. hot 6. cold 7. hot