

LIVING SKILLS

Personal Growth

MAKING DECISIONS

PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK



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AN OVERVIEW OF MAKING DECISIONS

Welcome to the Making Decisions workbook. The ability to make wise decisions and carry through with them is key to living a healthy life. Like any other skill, making good decisions becomes easier with practice.

THIS WORKBOOK IS DIVIDED INTO FOUR SESSIONS

SESSION 1 introduces the idea that making decisions is a skill, discusses why it is an important skill, and identifies the consequences of poor decision making.

SESSION 2 identifies decision-making styles, discusses the negative consequences of unbalanced decision-making styles, and discusses healthy decision-making styles.

SESSION 3 introduces the steps in making decisions, discusses the importance of following through on decisions, and explores possible solutions to personal decisions.

SESSION 4 examines how to learn from decisions and discusses taking enough time, consulting others for feedback, and trusting oneself as keys to wise decision making.



SESSION 1.

Introduction to Making Decisions

Mattie came home from work and collapsed on the sofa. She had worked the early shift at the diner, so she was home before her six-year-old, Andrew, got home from school. She was glad. She needed a few minutes to think, and it was hard to think when Andrew was there. Ashley, a woman she'd met at a party a month ago, had called to say her roommate moved out and Mattie could rent her second bedroom. Mattie didn't know Ashley very well, but she really wanted to get out of her mother's house. Ashley was not charging much, and the bedroom was big enough to put in a twin bed for Andrew. She wondered, What should I do? Mattie felt the weight of the decision press on her shoulders.



Like Mattie, you probably have felt the weight of decisions press on your shoulders too. Maybe you've had to decide whether to take a certain job. Or quit a job. Or decide where to live. Or whether to date someone or get married. Or stay married. Or apologize to an old friend.

We make decisions all the time. Fortunately they are not all big decisions like these. It's usually not too hard to decide what flavor ice cream you want or what clothes to wear in the morning. There is a difference between big decisions and small decisions. Some decisions matter, some not so much. When they matter, making the decision can often feel overwhelming, even scary.

Many of the decisions we make, both big and small, do matter. Poor decisions can set you back. For instance, if you get mad at your boss and walk out on a job without having another one, you may not be able to pay your rent.

Learning how to make healthy decisions is important. That doesn't mean there is always one right choice. There may be several right choices. What is important is making a choice that is healthy for you and for others. Learning a few simple skills takes much of the fear out of decision making. This workbook will help you learn those skills.

Let's begin by making a list of routine decisions you have made in the last week. Some examples are what to eat for breakfast, which movie to see with your friend, whether to buy a new pair of socks.

■ Write some of your decisions here.

■ Write down two big decisions you have had to make in the last year. Some examples are whether to buy a car, whether to get a new job, whether to move to a new neighborhood or even a new state. Write those decisions here.

Our decisions have consequences, positive and negative.

Mattie decided to move into Ashley’s second bedroom. Yes, the rent was affordable, but it turned out Ashley liked to party a lot, and there were many nights when people partied with her at the apartment. Not a good place for Mattie, and really not a good place for Andrew. Two months later, she moved back in with her mom, minus \$800 in rent and her cell phone, which was stolen during one of the parties.



■ Think of a decision you made that did not turn out the way you wanted it to. Write it down here.

■ Write down the consequences of that decision.

■ List some of the challenges you have when you try to make decisions (for example, you often make decisions based on what other people think rather than what you want).

- Imagine that you have learned how to take your time, think things through, check out your options, and make wise decisions. What difference would that make in your life?



After Mattie moved back home with her mom, she made a positive decision. She decided to take a class on how to improve her decision-making skills. Her goals were:

- *To take enough time to check out all her choices*
- *To make decisions based on reality, not wishful thinking*
- *To trust herself*

What are your goals as you work through this workbook? How would you end this sentence?

- If I were a better decision maker, I would be able to:

SUMMARY

- There are both big and small decisions we need to make.
- Learning how to make healthy decisions is important.
- Decisions have positive and negative consequences.

CHALLENGE

Interview one or two people who you think make wise decisions and ask those people how they do it.



SESSION 2.

What's Your Decision-Making Style?

We all develop certain styles in our lives. One style is how we dress. Another style is the type of music we listen to. Whatever your style is, it feels like you.

In the same way, we develop decision-making styles. They are a way of approaching decisions that becomes a habit. Sometimes they work for us. Sometimes they don't. It's worth taking time to look at your own style to see how you might benefit from adjusting it. Take the following quiz to help you think about your own decision-making style.

How Do I Make Decisions?

Complete the sentence below by placing a check mark next to the statements that apply to you.

WHEN FACED WITH MAKING A DECISION, I USUALLY...

- _____ **i** Choose the first thing that comes to mind.
- _____ **p** Wait to decide until I absolutely have to.
- _____ **d** Ask my friends what they think.
- _____ **w** Have trouble sleeping at night because of the big decision.
- _____ **p** Turn on the television or play a video game.
- _____ **w** Analyze the situation and all my options.
- _____ **d** Let my husband/wife/girlfriend/boyfriend decide for me.
- _____ **i** Choose whatever feels good.
- _____ **w** Panic.
- _____ **d** Think about what my friend would do.
- _____ **p** Sleep on it.
- _____ **w** Get stuck and don't make a decision.
- _____ **i** Hurry up and get it over with.
- _____ **w** List every pro and con I can think of, and then do it again.
- _____ **d** Think about how every person who matters to me will like or not like my decision.
- _____ **p** Make sure I feel the decision is the right one, even if it takes a long, long time to decide.
- _____ **i** Don't think much—just go with my gut.

To find out your score and help you determine your style, fill in how many of each letter you checked.

Number of <i>i</i> 's checked	_____	=	Go with Your Gut
Number of <i>w</i> 's checked	_____	=	Think It Through
Number of <i>p</i> 's checked	_____	=	Take Your Time
Number of <i>d</i> 's checked	_____	=	Poll Other People

Styles

People may divide decision-making styles into many different categories, but we are using these categories:



Go with Your Gut: This is when you jump at the first choice that comes into your mind. You may not want to take time to think through a decision; you just do it.



Think It Through: This is when you often want to thoroughly think through a particular decision and all the options. Sometimes, however, you may overthink a decision or second-guess yourself.



Take Your Time: This is when you don't like to make decisions fast. The problem with this style is sometimes you can put a decision off and off and off—maybe because you can't make up your mind, or maybe because you just don't want to think about it.



Poll Other People: With this style you like to get a lot of input from other people before you make a decision. This is great, but sometimes people with this style depend on someone else to make the decision for them or they may make the decision to please someone else.

All of these styles have problems when they are taken to the extreme. But their weaknesses can also be turned into strengths. Can you list the problems with each style, and then how those could be turned into strengths? Here is an example:

Go with Your Gut: A problem is that you don't think through a decision well. A strength is that you consider how you feel about something rather than making decisions to please others.

	PROBLEMS	STRENGTHS
Go with Your Gut		
Think It Through		
Take Your Time		
Poll Other People		

Examples of Decision-Making Styles

Read each of the following scenarios, and check which decision-making style is being used. The correct answers are listed at the end of this session.

Scenario 1



Remember Mattie from the last session? She got a phone call from Ashley that she needed a roommate and had space for her and Andrew. Mattie felt excitement race through her immediately. Her first thought was of how nice it would be to not have her mother looking over her shoulder. She took a half hour after getting home from work to think about it, but all she could think was, This could be so great. Before Andrew even got home from school, she had called Ashley and said “Yes!”

Go with Your Gut

Think It Through

Take Your Time

Poll Other People

Scenario 2

José worked as a waiter for a midsized restaurant. He didn't make much money there, but he was comfortable. He had friends there. He knew the routine really well. A friend told him about an opening for a waiter at a high-end restaurant where José could make much better tips. However, it was a little scary because he'd never worked in such a fancy place. And he only knew one person there—the friend who told him about the opening. Every day for a week when he got up in the morning he thought about the job, and every day he thought, I'll figure it out tomorrow. On Saturday his friend called to say, "I saw the manager took down the ad for a waiter. Did you apply?" José felt disappointment in the pit of his stomach. He really would have liked those tips.

 **Go with Your Gut** **Think It Through** **Take Your Time** **Poll Other People**

Scenario 3



Tuam worked at a car wash. He was the oldest son in his family, which had immigrated to the United States when Tuam was two years old. He knew his parents were counting on him to be a success. And he also wanted to be a success. He knew he didn't want to work in a car wash forever. He wanted to go to school. But he didn't know if he wanted to go to a community college, a four-year college, or a technical school. He researched his options on a computer at the local library. He made long lists of the pros and cons of each choice. After a while, he started having trouble sleeping, but he still could not bring himself to make a choice and fill out an application. What if he made the wrong choice?

Go with Your Gut

Take Your Time

Think It Through

Poll Other People

Scenario 4

Daniela wanted to buy a car. She saw a used car that she liked. She had saved up enough money to make a good down payment, and she looked at her budget and knew she could make the monthly payments. She talked to her husband about it. "I think it's a good deal. I could take it to a garage to have them check it out before I buy it to make sure it's in good shape. It would sure make life easier if I didn't have to take a bus home from work late at night. What do you think?" Her husband scowled. "That car looks like junk to me. Forget it. You don't really need a car anyway. I can always pick you up from work if it gets really late." Daniela really wanted that car, but she didn't buy it.

 **Go with Your Gut** **Think It Through** **Take Your Time** **Poll Other People**

The people in each of these examples were pretty extreme in their styles. If they used the strengths of their own style or the strengths of the other styles, they could be better decision makers. Then they would be *balanced* decision makers. For each scenario, write down how they could have been more balanced as they made their decisions. What would each of them have done if they were balanced decision makers? Some example answers are listed at the end of this session.

■ **Scenario 1.** Mattie’s move

■ **Scenario 2.** José’s job opportunity

■ **Scenario 3.** Tuam’s school decision

■ **Scenario 4.** Daniela’s new car

How Useful Has My Style Been?

Think of a big decision you made in the past. What about your style was useful when you made that decision?

■ What was not useful?

■ How did the style you used in making that decision affect other people in your life?

■ Are there ways you would like to change your style? What kinds of changes would you like to make?

- What would it look like for you if you had a more balanced style?

SUMMARY

- Everyone has a certain decision-making style.
- There are four decision-making styles: go with your gut, think it through, take your time, and poll other people.
- Each decision-making style has its strengths and weaknesses.
- People can become more balanced in their decision-making style.

CHALLENGE

Identify specific actions you can take to become a more balanced decision maker.
Practice those actions.

ANSWER KEY

(pages 10-13)

Examples of Decision-Making Styles

Here are the decision-making styles that were used in the scenarios:

Scenario 1:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Go with Your Gut | <input type="checkbox"/> Think It Through |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take Your Time | <input type="checkbox"/> Poll Other People |

Scenario 2:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Go with Your Gut | <input type="checkbox"/> Think It Through |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Take Your Time | <input type="checkbox"/> Poll Other People |

Scenario 3:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Go with Your Gut | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Think It Through |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take Your Time | <input type="checkbox"/> Poll Other People |

Scenario 4:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Go with Your Gut | <input type="checkbox"/> Think It Through |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take Your Time | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Poll Other People |

ANSWER KEY

(page 14)

For each scenario, you were asked to write down how the person could have been more balanced as he or she made the decision. What would each of them have done if they were balanced decision makers?

Scenario 1. Mattie's move

Mattie should've taken some time to think it through. Asking some trusted friends might have helped as well.

Scenario 2. José's job opportunity

José should've gone with his gut and taken action right away, despite his fear. Talking to other friends would've helped him get the courage to apply for the job.

Scenario 3. Tuam's school decision

Tuam needs to make the decision. He's done his research. He could also poll his friends and then take action.

Scenario 4. Daniela's new car

Since Daniela has her own budget and money and has really thought through the decision, she should buy the car.



SESSION 3. Decision-Making Steps

Our decisions have consequences—sometimes positive, sometimes negative. They have an impact on us, our children, our parents, our partners, and even on strangers we interact with. So it's important to be skilled in making decisions. Fortunately, we can learn how to make wise decisions.

There are specific steps you can follow when you make a decision. They are:

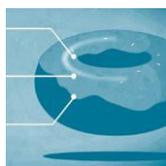
Example:



1. Identify the decision that needs to be made. Determine if it is in your control. Is this something about which you can actually make a decision?



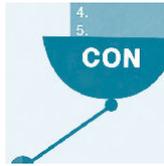
2. Clearly define the decision.



3. Identify your options. This might mean doing some research by reading and talking to people.



4. List the pros and cons of each option. Think about the pros and cons for yourself and for the other people in your life.



5. Rank the pros and cons according to how important they are. Then weigh the pros against the cons.



6. Make the decision.



7. Take action.

■ Think about two decisions you have to make. Write down one small decision and one big decision.

Map Your Decision-Making Process

Choose one of the decisions you just wrote down and write out below how you will follow the steps in making that decision.

1. Is the decision in your control? Is it something you can actually decide about?

■ Write your answer below.

2. Write out a clear definition of the decision. Remember José from the last session? He had a decision to make about whether to apply for a new job. If he was writing a definition, it might look like this: “I will decide if I will apply for a job as a waiter at a high-end restaurant and, if I get it, quit my current job.”

■ Define your decision.

3. Identify your options. Using José again as an example, he has two options. He could apply for the waiter job or he could decide to stay in the job he currently has.

■ Write your options below.

Option 1 _____

Option 2 _____

One thing that is helpful to do before you list pros and cons is to do some research about your options. For example, José could do some research on waiter jobs. He could look at want ads to see how many and what kind of waiter jobs are available where he lives. He could ask his friend about the amount of tips that is typical for a shift. He could ask his friend if the other people working there are friendly.

- Write down the questions you want answers to in order to make your decision, and explain how you will find those answers.

4. Look at the pros and cons. Below is an example of what José’s list might look like.

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More money• Could give my ex more child support• Chance to learn more• Improve my resume• Meet new people	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have to buy new uniforms• Have longer commute• Have to learn more• Won’t get to see my friends at old job• Might have to work shifts I don’t like

Fill in the pros and cons for the decision you have to make.

PROS	CONS

5. Rank your pros and cons according to importance. Assign each pro and con a number from zero to four. Write the number next to each pro and con in your chart.

<p>0 = Doesn't matter at all</p> <p>1 = Doesn't matter much</p> <p>2 = Matters a little</p>	<p>3 = Matters quite a bit</p> <p>4 = Matters a lot</p>
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This is a step where you need to check in with your feelings. You might want to close your eyes and imagine the situation and see what your gut is telling you.

After you have given each pro and con a number, add up the number of points you have for pros. Then add up the number of points you have for cons. Put the totals in the spaces below.

This is what José’s pros and cons looked like after he ranked them and totaled the points.

PROS	CONS
4 More money	1 Have to buy new uniforms
4 Could give my ex more child support	3 Have longer commute
2 Chance to learn more	0 Have to learn more
3 Improve my resume	4 Won’t get to see my friends at old job
1 Meet new people	2 Might have to work shifts I don’t like
Positive points: 14	Negative points: 10

How do your pros and cons add up?

PROS	CONS
Positive points:	Negative points:

6. Now it is time to make the decision. What decision are you going to make?

■ Write it here.

7. Take action. This sounds like the easy part. Just add up the points and then do it. But taking action can be just as hard as making the decision in the first place.

We often make decisions but don't follow through on them. This is especially true when it's something we think we should do, or want to do, but it's difficult. But making a decision is only worthwhile if you take action on it. It doesn't do much good to decide you're going to quit smoking if you immediately tell yourself, *That was a hard decision, but I'm glad I made it. I'll quit soon.* And then you light up a cigarette.

There are lots of reasons people have for not taking action on a decision. They get distracted. A friend calls and invites them to do something. They feel stressed and tell themselves they need to take a break and watch some television. They don't know how to get started, so they feel overwhelmed and just don't do anything about it.

■ Write down some of the things that could get in the way of following through on the decision you have made.

Your Decisions Affect Other People

Remember to consider the impact your decision will have on other people when you are making your pros and cons list. José thought about the impact his decision would have on his child and his ex-wife. José could remember a time in the past when he hadn't bothered to think about the impact his decision would have on his child. He decided to stop for a drink before he picked up his son from school. Not only was he late, which was frightening for his child, but his reactions were slow and he rear-ended a car in front of him on his way home. Fortunately his son wasn't hurt, but this, too, frightened his child. It also frightened José.

■ Can you think of a time when a decision you made hurt someone else?

■ Can you think of a time when a decision you made helped someone else?

Take time to practice these decision-making steps every day for the next week. You might even want to write each step down as you did in this workbook. It's worth taking the time to practice this skill because positive decision making can help you and the people you care about. When you have these skills you can make hard decisions with confidence, knowing that you made the best decision you could with the information, resources, and time available.

SUMMARY

- There are seven decision-making steps: identify the decision, define the decision, identify your options, list the pros and cons of each option, rank the pros and cons by importance, make the decision, and take action.
- It is important for people to follow through on their decisions.
- People should consider how their decisions will impact other people.
- It is critical to practice these steps to become a better decision maker.

CHALLENGE

Think about another important decision you need to make and use the decision-making process to help you make that decision. Share your process and decision with your significant other or friend.



SESSION 4.

Learning from Your Decisions

In an earlier session, you learned about a woman named Mattie who made a poor decision when she and her son moved into Ashley's second bedroom. Ashley had friends over late into the night many nights of the week, making a lot of noise and, even worse, sharing drugs. It turned out to be an unhealthy environment for Mattie's son and also for Mattie.

What do you think Mattie learned from this decision? She learned to plan ahead. She learned that the next time an opportunity came up to move out of her mother's place, she should be sure she knew what she was getting into before she did it. She should know the person well enough to know that person's values and lifestyle.

It's valuable to reflect on decisions we've made so we can learn from them. If we've made a decision that didn't turn out well, it will have lessons for us about what we should do differently in the future. And if we are happy with the results of a decision we have made, we can look back and see what steps we took that were effective in making the decision.

We are going to learn some tips for helping us make good decisions and look at some of our past decisions to see if we could have done anything differently if we had used that tip.



TIP 1: Check your gut feelings. You have a lot of wisdom that can help you make better decisions. Tapping into this deeper knowledge about yourself—about your needs and your values—is an important part of making wise choices. When you are making decisions, it can be helpful to find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed while you are thinking. It may be outdoors in a natural setting or in your room.

Put on some quiet, soothing music that you enjoy, or sit in silence. Close your eyes. Think about the different options that you identified. Notice any thoughts or feelings that you have about them. Go through your list of options and jot down any feelings you have about them.

■ Can you remember a time when you went ahead with a decision even though you had a bad feeling about it? What was the outcome?

■ Can you remember a time when you felt really good about an option you chose? What was the outcome?



TIP 2: Get advice from someone you trust. Reaching out for help is a crucial part of making wise decisions. Getting input and feedback from others helps you clarify your feelings and thoughts. If you tend to be impulsive—making decisions without thinking them through first—others can help you slow down and reflect on your needs and options. If you procrastinate, talking to others might give you a needed jump start. If you are a worrier, talking with others can help you keep from getting stuck. If yours is a dependent style, you still need to reach out to people you trust, but you need to remember to balance their advice with your own thoughts and feelings. You are not asking them to make the decision for you. You are also not trying to figure out what they want you to do, but you are probing their minds to see if they have any ideas you haven't thought of yourself.

■ As you start to make decisions and take an active part in shaping your life, think about the people who can help you sort things out. Write down the names of people or places you can go to for support in making and carrying out your decisions.



TIP 3: Sleep on it if you have time. While this is especially important advice for people whose style is impulsive, it is good advice for everyone. It can be very tempting to make a decision quickly or feel very sure of your decision. But giving yourself twenty-four hours to live with the idea of the decision lets you gain some perspective.

■ Have you ever made a decision quickly and then wished you had slept on it? If so, write down what that decision was.

Reviewing Decisions

- Think about a poor decision you have made. What was the decision?

- What did you learn from this decision?

- Consider the three tips: check your gut feelings, get advice from someone you trust, and sleep on it if you have time. Do you wish you had used any of these tips when making this decision? Which ones?

■ Now think about a good decision you have made. What was the decision?

■ What did you learn from this decision?

■ Did you use any of the tips when making this decision? Which ones?

Review Your Goals

■ Do you now have the skills that you wanted to learn to be a good decision maker?

■ What key skills will you take away from this program?

■ What key skills do you want to strengthen? How will you do this?

SUMMARY

The ability to make wise decisions and carry through with them is essential in developing a healthy life. Like any other acquired skill, making wise decisions becomes easier with practice and by following the tips we talked about in this session.

CHALLENGE

Take the one improvement you identified during the session and start putting it into practice.



RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

**Resources Available through Hazelden Publishing
(800-328-9000, hazelden.org/bookstore)**

***Finding Your Moral Compass:
Transformative Principles to Guide You in Recovery and Life***

Craig Nakken (Order No. 7459, E-book Order No. EB7459)

Craig Nakken, author of the best-selling book *The Addictive Personality*, gives readers in recovery the model and tools needed to make life decisions in the pursuit of good. He offers forty-one universally accepted principles, paired as positive and negative counterparts, that guide behavior.

