

Choices

Teaching About Decision Making

Adults often view themselves as the persons with the right knowledge and correct answers to give to uninformed children. As an adult you may think that it's easier and quicker to tell children what to do and how to think than to teach children how to make decisions for themselves.

There are many things that a child cannot control: who is in their family, where they live, what their parents' occupations are or which school they attend. Still, children do have a surprising number of choices that they make daily. The choices they make now will help them learn how to make significant decisions for the future. Look for ways to offer children practice in making appropriate choices.

WHY TEACH CHILDREN ABOUT DECISION MAKING?

To develop responsibility. Today, a child's biggest decision may be what kind of cereal to eat. As an adult, he or she must choose a career, a spouse, where to live, how to vote, and how to serve God and humanity. Making small choices now will give a child knowledge and experience which builds into greater ability to make important decisions later in life.

To develop confidence. A child who is not allowed to make little choices now will not feel that he or she can make good decisions later on in life. A child who is told constantly what to do can be easily swayed by other people. Children may later be resentful or angry about the choices made for them. A child without experience or confidence in decision making may make bad choices based on rebellion, emotion or lack of information.

To teach independence. A child will not be under the guidance of his or her parents forever. At some point the child must set his or her own course, start a new family and possibly move far away. Making good

choices now will help a child move into mature independence.

To facilitate good behavior. Discipline problems can be averted when children choose what they want to do from among options you provide. Letting children make small choices in class will give them ownership of their learning and maintain their interest.

To make godly choices. A parent can lead a child to God but the child must make the decision of discipleship for him- or herself. You cannot force a child to live the Christian life. By making good choices now, a child will be more likely to choose a lifestyle pleasing to God when he or she is older.

HOW DO I TEACH ABOUT DECISION MAKING?

Allow age-appropriate choices. Let young children make small choices (which toy to take on a trip, milk or juice, which shoes they want to wear to the park, etc.) and increase responsibility as the children grow older. Don't burden children with decisions beyond their experience and knowledge.

Be supportive. If a child wants to color a picture with only black and brown markers, that's OK. Children may not make the best or most rational decision, but affirm them as long as their choice is not disruptive, is not harmful to themselves or others or is not morally wrong.

Role-play. Older children can act out scenarios where they pretend to be in difficult situations, such as when they see another student cheating on a test. Act out different endings to the situation and discuss the best choice.

Provide active learning. Obviously, children are too immature to completely govern their lives. However, children will be more interested in family activities

when they have some control over what they include. Give children the opportunity to make choices:

- ★ Choose between two different activities prepared at home.
- ★ Choose the colors and materials for art projects.
- ★ Select which Bible verse to memorize.
- ★ Decide which part to play in a Bible story skit.
- ★ Decide on a team name for a game.
- ★ Select a family service project.
- ★ Design a banner or a logo for a family t-shirt.

With active learning, be sure that all the children have an opportunity to make decisions. Be careful that one or two strong-willed kids don't intimidate the more quiet ones.

Experience consequences. When children make a less-than-perfect choice and it causes no physical or emotional harm to them or their peers, let them experience the consequences. Adults who constantly protect a child

or cover for a child's mistake will not let the child learn the actual results of behavior. If a child is consistently late with chores, don't wait to start a fun activity. If two children constantly bicker, then tell those children they will need to be separated for a while. When children see that their behavior has consequences, they learn to make better choices.

Distinguish between good and evil. Modern society expects each person to decide what is ethically and morally right for him- or herself. But to make good moral choices, children need to know what God expects! While God allows people to choose their actions, His established behavior standards never change. Teach children what God expects from His children.

Use biblical examples. The Bible shows the consequences of good and bad decisions. The Israelites chose to worship an idol and God punished them. Mary chose to give birth to Jesus and helped bring salvation to the world. Use Bible stories to show kids what great things can happen when decisions are made that honor God.