

Supporting children's decision making skills

Suggestions for teaching staff

Effective decision making skills are important for children's learning in many areas.

When children are supported to make responsible decisions at school it helps them manage their own behaviour and relate more effectively to others. Many situations provide opportunities to teach and reinforce children's developing decision making skills at school. These arise in formal learning, social activities, play, and in choosing appropriate behaviour in the school grounds. School staff can assist children to manage their behaviour at school by teaching skills for decision making and encouraging children to use them in a range of situations.

Teach skills for decision making and goal setting

• For younger students:

- Provide opportunities to make simple decisions. Asking students to explain the reasons for their choices helps them develop skills of evaluation.
- Comment on decisions made by characters in stories – e.g., "Do you think Charlie made a good decision? Do you think he should have done something different?"
- Model the steps for decision making by talking through decisions you need to make.

• For older students:

- Explicitly teach the steps of decision making and provide practice in using them.
- Build goal setting and decision making steps into assigned learning tasks by making them an explicit component of task instructions. This builds their capacity for self-regulated learning, which has been shown to enhance academic performance.
Step 1: What's my goal?
Step 2: What strategies/options can help?
Step 3: What are the pros and cons of each option?
Step 4: Choose the best one to try.
Step 5: Evaluate how my choice worked. What do I need to change?

• Involve students in decision making

- Even younger students can be involved (with guidance) in deciding on classroom and school rules. Children accept that adults will make the final decision, but appreciate being consulted and having the opportunity to contribute to the rules. In addition

to building children's decision making skills this helps them to own and accept rules as necessary and fair.

- Providing students with some choice over what and how they learn can enhance motivation as well as responsibility.

• Encourage children's decision making to promote responsible behaviour

Asking "Was that a good decision?" helps children to evaluate their actions. Asking "What's a better way to handle it?" prompts them to choose a better option. Asking "What can we do about this?" invites them to discuss a problem and to get your help in thinking of a strategy for managing it better.

• Support growing independence by fostering decision making

Primary school children often expect teaching staff to make decisions for them. This sometimes occurs even for relatively minor decisions that children could make for themselves. Teaching and reinforcing the steps of decision making helps to support children to develop independence and confidence in their own judgment. For example, a child who is given a specific suggestion in response to the question "What should we play?" learns that adults are good at determining what she should do. When the response is "Let's see, what ideas do you have?" she is encouraged to take responsibility for generating options herself. Further 'scaffolding' can help her to evaluate the options and make a choice, at the same time increasing her confidence for deciding independently in the future.

This resource is part of the KidsMatter Primary initiative. The team at KidsMatter welcomes your feedback at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



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