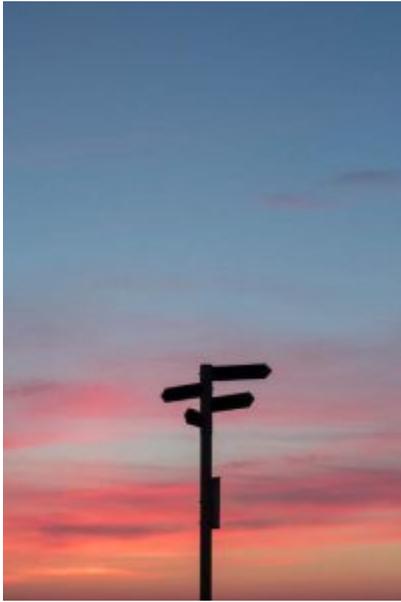


Decision Making



Parenting is an unending stream of decisions, and good decision making is one of the most important skills your children need. It is a skill to model and teach. Making the best decisions/choices about how to react to a situation requires thought and strategic planning. Here are some ideas to consider when making decisions and teaching your children about decision making:

Don't let an initial emotional reaction be the boss of you. Unlike our stone-age ancestors, we rarely need to make snap decisions. Our brains have developed to incorporate reasoning, and that reasoning will find you asking, 'Why did I think that?', 'Why do I feel this way?', 'What is the best way to deal with this situation?', 'Is there another perspective here?', 'Should I make the decision right now or give it the grace of time?'

List alternatives and rephrase the question. Write down the problem in three or four different ways. Forcing yourself to think about the problem in different ways makes it easier to come up with different solutions. Write down every option you have for the decision you're making and spend time thinking about the consequences of each alternative.

Remember that time is on your side. Distance gives perspective and remember to separate yourself from the emotions of the moment. Put time between now and when you make a decision.

Think of the decision as a test. Think of it in terms of not getting another chance and others grading your logic. One of the main differences between adult and child decision-making is that often children are impulsive and focussed on instant gratification. Modelling the behavior of 'stop before you leap' when making decisions is paramount. One of the main teaching points is to help children to think of the options that are available within the decision and possible consequences of a decision made if any of the options were chosen. The possible risks and rewards short-term and long-term also need to be judged.

Make the decision concrete. Are you deciding on a career path, whether to contact the school over an issue or which cereal to eat? Give the importance of the decision the appropriate consideration. If your motivation is to achieve the best outcome without being

reactionary, and the above steps have been considered, then it is likely the decision will be one to be proud of.

Coach good decision making by modelling, teaching the steps above, and noticing and commenting on good choices made. Present your children with hypothetical dilemmas, such as what to do if they witness someone being teased, if encouraged by a peer to do something they know is wrong, whether to put in extra effort when not feeling like doing so, and help them plan how they would make a good choice. If handled well, poor decisions that children may make, along with the experience of the consequences (rescuing a child from poor decisions enables them to make poor decisions), can play a powerful role in their learning and will help them to make a better choice next time.

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