

Introduction to Responsible Decision Making,

Personal Problem Solving & Goal Setting

[Decision Making & Personal Problem Solving Module](#)

The Importance of Being Able to Make Decisions, Solve Personal & Relationship Problems, and Set & Reach Goals

Making decisions, solving personal & relationship problems, and developing and reaching goals are essential for emotional, social, and physical well-being. However, these skills do not exist in isolation from the other social-emotional skills. We must be self-aware to make healthy decisions, solve personal problems, and set and reach our goals. We must be aware of our values, strengths, needs, weaknesses, personal and relationship problems, what gives us a sense of purpose and meaning, and the environments, activities, and relationships that generate pleasant feelings and those that create unpleasant feelings. We must be aware of and accept the full range and depth of what we are feeling and thinking and why we feel and think this way. The process of being self-aware is a prerequisite for making healthy decisions, solving personal problems, and setting goals that are consistent with our values and meet our true needs. We do not manage our feelings and thinking, and solve personal and relationship problems by pretending they don't exist or holding them inside. We manage them by accepting them, making decisions, and setting goals to change ourselves, our situations, our environments, and/or our relationships. We will meet our needs if we make good decisions, solve personal problems, and reach our goals.

Levels of Decision Making, Personal Problem Solving, & Goal Setting

Level 1 Decision Making/Problem-Solving/Goal Setting.

The easiest decisions require only a little analysis and/or exploration of alternatives and choices. Examples include setting a goal to self-disclose more often or to start using "I Statements." The My Goals Learning Experience and the My Goals Log ([SES Projects Module](#)) can help students develop competency in developing, implementing, and successfully meeting these types of goals. Most of the learning experiences in this document provide an opportunity for students to develop and implement goals using the My Goals Log. In addition, more complex behavior change projects may also be developed after students have decided to change their behavior (see the [Social-Emotional Skills Projects Module](#)).

Level 2 Decision Making/Problem-Solving/Goal Setting: The D.E.C.I.D.E. Process.

The next level is for more complex decisions and personal problems that require extensive analysis and/or the exploration of alternatives and choices. The D.E.C.I.D.E. decision-making process to make tough choices and solve personal problems may be used. The steps in this process include:

- A. **D**efine the Problem, Issue, Choice, or Dilemma
- B. **E**xplore the Alternatives/Choices
- C. **C**onsider the Positive and Negative Consequences
- D. **I**dentify Short and Long Term Goals and Values
- E. **D**ecide and Act
- F. **E**valuate the Success of The Decision/Choice

In this module, see the **D.E.C.I.D.E. Decision Making Process for Making Tough Choices and Solving Problems** ([Decision Making & Personal Problem Solving Module](#)).

Level 3 Decision Making/Problem Solving/Goal Setting: The ABC Model of Behavior Change.

The next level is for starting a new behavior, being more consistent in applying a current behavior or reducing or eliminating an unhealthy behavior or habit. Examples of these behaviors include exercising, meditating, doing relaxation techniques, brushing and flossing, doing homework, practicing a musical instrument, setting time aside for personal projects, eliminating junk food from one's diet, stopping procrastinating, etc. Because it can be challenging to start and maintain new behaviors, it is easier if the behavior becomes a habit. One can apply the Antecedent-Behavior-Consequences (ABC) Model of Behavior Change to develop positive habits and quit negative behaviors. The steps in this process to start and continue a new behavior include:

- A. Select a signal (**A**ntecedent) to cue your new behavior.
- B. Immediately perform the **B**ehavior after the signal.
- C. Provide a positive **C**onsequence (reward) for doing the behavior.
- D. Chart your progress
- E. Continue the sequence.

An example of the application of this model for starting an exercise program would be to select an Antecedent that will cue the behavior (e.g., doing the exercises at the same time of the day on the same days of the week), doing the exercises (the **B**ehavior) on the same days at the same time, and giving oneself a positive Consequence/reward (e.g., self-praise, listening to music, texting friends, etc.) following successful completion of the exercises. Chart one's daily progress and continue the sequence. See the Antecedent-Behavior-Consequences (ABC) Model of Behavior Change ([Decision Making & Personal Problem Solving Module](#)) for a complete discussion of this model.

Level 4 Decision Making/Problem-Solving/Goal Setting: Interpersonal Conflict Resolution

The fourth level is when we need to work through a misunderstanding, impasse, or conflict in a relationship. Working through interpersonal conflicts may be the most essential skill for personal, family, and career success. It may also be the most challenging skill to learn and do well. To work through misunderstandings, impasses, and conflicts in relationships, we need to master the following skills:

1. Be aware of what we feel and think and why we feel and think this way, and understand our needs and values (**self-awareness**).
2. Be an effective listener to know and understand others (**passive & active listening**).
3. **Ask clarifying & inquiry questions** when we don't understand fully.
4. Speak in ways that will make others want to listen to us, understand us, consider what we have to say, and possibly change their behavior to help meet our needs (**I Statements**).
5. Have difficult conversations with people to work through misunderstandings, impasses, and conflicts (**interpersonal conflict resolution skills**).
6. **Assertively say no** when being pressured to do something we don't want to do.

See the [Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#) and the [Conflict Resolution Skills Module](#) for learning experiences that facilitate the development of these skills.

See the [Decision Making & Problem-Solving Reading](#) and the [Developing and Successfully Meeting Goals Skill Card](#) ([Decision Making & Personal Problem Solving Module](#)) for additional information on the criteria for healthy and effective goals

Teaching Decision Making/Problem Solving/Goal Setting to Facilitate Self-Efficacy & a Growth Mindset

Students must be given multiple opportunities to develop, implement, and evaluate their goals to become competent decision-makers and personal problem solvers and to achieve their goals. Giving students the opportunity to make decisions, solve personal and interpersonal problems, and develop real-life goals provides them the opportunity to learn that they can master their environments with practice, effort, experience, and the development of skills.

To facilitate self-efficacy and develop a growth mindset, students need to share their goals, successes, and failures. You, the teacher, need to also develop and share your goals, successes, and failures in meeting them. By sharing your experience, you are acting as a social role model. By having students share their goals and their struggles to meet them, they also act as social role models for one another.

When students share, they also become aware that they are not the only ones who want to change their lives and will discover that some of their concerns, problems, and goals are the same or similar to those of others. When students see others who are similar to them struggle to meet their goals, it raises the belief that they can be successful. When they are successful, experiencing mastery provides evidence that they are successful. When they successfully meet their goals, they need to understand what contributed to their success so they can use these processes and skills in the future. If students are not successful in meeting their goals, it is essential to have them evaluate why and determine what they need to do to be more successful, as well as to provide them with other opportunities to continue to work on

meeting their goals. By focusing on the learning process and not merely the outcome, you can also help students develop a growth mindset. Not meeting goals should not be considered a failure but an opportunity to learn how to be more successful in the future. Positive verbal feedback should be provided when students are successful and when they continue to struggle to find more effective ways to succeed. We want students to be inspired to take healthy physical, emotional, and social risks, knowing they will occasionally fail and then try again.

Teaching Decision Making & Problem-Solving

Social-emotional skills can be learned if they are modeled and systematically taught by teachers. If the skills are taught, and if students are given multiple opportunities to practice the skills in the classroom, process their use of the skill, receive feedback, and use them in their lives outside the classroom, they will be able to master them, and these skills can become an integral part of their lives. Outlined below are the steps in teaching a skill.

Helping Students See the Need for the Skill

Providing students with a rationale for learning a new skill and relating it to their past, present, or future experiences can help them see a need to learn it.

Ensuring Students Understand What the Skill Is

Skills need to be specific, observable, and describable.

Setting Up Repetitive Practice Sessions

Students need a chance to ‘try on’ the new skill and see how it fits. We can’t just ask our students to talk about a new skill. Like a coach and music teacher, we need to give them a chance to practice it. This means having students practice the skill repeatedly. Most skill-development learning experiences provide students with the opportunity to role-play those skills in class.

Ensuring That Students Process Their Use of the Skills and Receive Feedback Whenever Possible

Practicing is not enough. Students must be given time to reflect on and process their use of the skills to determine what they did well and what they need to do better the next time they use it. Whenever possible, students should be given feedback on the quality of their use of the skill. Many skill-development learning experiences use self-evaluation and student observers/coaches.

Apply the Skills in Real-Life Situations

It is not enough to have students role-play the skills only in class. At some point, students need to start using the skills in real-life situations. They must be given opportunities to apply skills in real-life outside of class. Using skills in real-life situations, processing the results, and modifying their response is necessary and must be continuous and ongoing.

Following the completion of many learning experiences, students can set a goal to apply a skill and change their behavior outside of school. Behavior change projects and assessments can be very simple or very complex. The simplest behavior change project involves using the [My Goals Log](#) ([SES Projects Module](#)), where students develop a goal and evaluate their success at the midpoint and again at the end of the project. More complex projects involve students developing and implementing a plan to change their behavior, monitoring their progress over time using self-monitoring charts, and self-assessing their effort, progress, and/or the extent to which they completed the project. See the [Social-Emotional Skills Projects Module](#) for examples of these projects.

For a full explanation of teaching skills, see the How To Teach SES in the [How To Teach Social-Emotional Skills Module](#).

Assessment, Evaluation, & Grading

See How to Assess & Grade SES Skills in the [Assessment & Grading Module](#) for different ways for students to self-assess and for you to evaluate the completeness and quality of their work, their understanding of concepts and skills, and their level of self-awareness and self-insight. Additional methods for students to self-assess the extent to which they met their goals, the effort they put into meeting them, and the progress they made are included.

Mastering social-emotional skills is highly complex. These skills cannot be mastered in a few classes. Below are the learning experiences found in this module. The more time given to teaching these skills, the greater the chance students will master them.

Decision Making and Personal Problem Solving Learning Experiences & Readings

[Decision Making & Personal Problem Solving Module](#)

Decision Making, Personal Problem Solving, and Setting & Reaching Goals Reading [Decision Making & Personal Problem Solving Module](#)

This reading outlines the different levels of decision-making and problem-solving addressed in this module, as well as tips for developing and successfully meeting goals.

Developing & Successfully Meeting Goals Skill Card. [Decision Making & Personal Problem Solving Module](#)

This skill card summarizes the different levels of decision-making, personal problem-solving, & goal-setting, the importance of developing goals, and the criteria for developing healthy and effective goals.

D.E.C.I.D.E. Model. [Decision Making & Personal Problem Solving Module](#)

Students complete this form when making a decision for one of the cases, making a personal decision, and solving a personal problem.

D.E.C.I.D.E. Model Skill Card. [Decision Making & Personal Problem Solving Module](#)

This skill card outlines the steps in the D.E.C.I.D.E. Decision Making Process.

Making It Easier To Change Our Behavior: The Antecedent-Behavior-Consequences (ABC) Model of Behavior Change. [Decision Making & Personal Problem Solving Module](#)

The document outlines the ABC Model of developing and maintaining healthy habits and quitting negative behavior.

Decision-Making Cases Learning Experience. [Decision Making & Personal Problem Solving Module](#)

This learning experience provides students with the opportunity to apply the D.E.C.I.D.E. model to two hypothetical cases. Teachers may also use this process to develop cases/situations that are relevant and developmentally appropriate for their students.

See the [Conflict Resolution Skills Module](#) for readings, examples, and learning experiences on resolving misunderstandings and conflicts in relationships.

Applying Self-Management & Goal-Setting Skills In Real Life Situations

My Goals Learning Experience ([SES Projects Module](#)).

Students can keep a My Goals Log to develop and track goals following most learning experiences. It does not require as much time or assessments as the SES Projects.

- **My Goals Log** ([SES Projects Module](#)). Students use this log to write their goals, to assess how they are doing at a midpoint and what, if anything, they need to do to be more successful, and then to evaluate their success at the end of the project. The log keeps track of all goals they develop throughout the year.

Decision I Need to Make or a Personal Problem I Need to Solve Project ([SES Projects Module](#))

This project provides students with the opportunity to apply the D.E.C.I.D.E. model to a decision they need to make or a personal problem they need to solve. It is suggested that this project be used several times throughout the year to help students internalize the process.