Healthy Minds, Healthy Neighborhoods

Family Tools: Decision-Making

The ability to make healthy and safe choices in my home, school, and community.

Healthy Minds, Healthy Neighborhoods Focuses on Steps to Social-Emotional Health:

- Self-Regulation
- Decision-Making Skills
- Self-Awareness
- Building Relationships
- Social Awareness
Our Partners:
AEON Social Emotional Health
Bradley University Teacher Education Department
The Center for Prevention of Abuse
Children's Home Association of Illinois
City of Peoria
  – Department of Police/Peoria Neighborhood Services
FamilyCore
Hult Center for Healthy Living
Human Service Center
NAMI Tri-County Illinois
OSF HealthCare Children's Hospital of Illinois
PCCEO Head Start
Peoria County Bright Futures
Peoria Housing Authority
Peoria Public Schools
Pleasant Hill School District 69
Rogy's Learning Place
Sharon Doubet, Illinois State University
Tazewell-Woodford Head Start
Tazwood Center for Wellness
UnityPoint Health Methodist | Proctor
Woodford County Health Department

The Social-Emotional Tools presented by Healthy Minds, Healthy Neighborhoods are part of the Heart of Illinois United Way’s Success By 6 and Supporting Student Success (S3) Initiatives.

Family Tools: Decision-Making

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5. How to Find Alternatives to Unhealthy Behaviors

Need Help?
Call Heart of Illinois
2-1-1 Dial 211 or
309-999-4029
211hoi.org

Additional Resources:
heartmath.org
helpguide.org
parenttoolkit.com

Working together to strengthen our community!
#1 Decision-Making: How to Identify Beliefs and Values for Decision-Making

| EARLY CHILDHOOD  
<table>
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<th>(Birth-Age 5)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What Does this Skill Mean?</strong></td>
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<td>A value is something that is important to you, i.e. family, health, and honesty. Values determine behaviors and actions. Young children learn values by observing others’ behaviors and drawing conclusions about what others think is important in life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Help young children identify values by sharing and discussing what is important to you. Identify and share your family values in your actions and words.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Discussion Starters:</strong></td>
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<td>Values are expressed through the rules and boundaries that we model and communicate with young children. For example, if a family values kindness, use words of encouragement, such as, “You can do it,” or “Wow, you are working so hard on that puzzle!”</td>
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<td><strong>Everyday Practice:</strong></td>
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<td>Share your values with your children throughout your day. For example, you help an elderly person with groceries. You might say, “I always enjoy helping others. It makes me feel happy!” Notice positive behaviors that mirror your family values. For example, “I notice you helping your little brother zip his coat. You are being kind.”</td>
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| ELEMENTARY  
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<td><strong>What Does this Skill Mean?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Values are personal beliefs that provide a “sense of direction” to guide behaviors in decision-making. Children need to know and communicate the importance of their own values in order to make healthy decisions.</td>
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<td><strong>Discussion Starters:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Share a happy moment in your life with your children and describe a personal value associated with that moment. Ask your children to think of a moment in their lives when they felt happy, fulfilled, or content. What values relate to that moment and why?</td>
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<td><strong>Everyday Practice:</strong></td>
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<td>Discuss and identify what values are important to all members of the family and why. Create and display a family values poster in a prominent place for all to see. Refer to the family values poster and acknowledge which value(s) children are using to make decisions in home, school, and the community. Notice when your child is using a family value and celebrate it!</td>
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| JUNIOR HIGH / HIGH SCHOOL  
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<td>Values evolve over one’s lifetime. Help your teen to identify values by sharing and discussing your own personal values and how they evolved over time. Explain to your teen that decisions, i.e. friends, careers, lifestyles, and the type of person they become all are affected by their values.</td>
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<td>Ask teens what values are important in their life. How did those values become important? Lead a discussion about the teens’ values about school, love, their future, work, and the world around them. Teens will be more open if you are willing to share your opinions and listen without judgment to theirs.</td>
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<td><strong>Everyday Practice:</strong></td>
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| Notice when teens are acting in accordance with their values and praise them for being true to themselves. Encourage open discussion about values with the entire family at dinner time or when celebrating shared traditions.
#2 Decision-Making: How to Make Healthy Decisions

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<tr>
<th>Early Childhood (Birth-Age 5)</th>
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<th>Junior High / High School (Grade 7-Grade 12)</th>
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<td>Developing healthy decision-making skills takes practice and coaching. As a caregiver, it may be tempting to step in and make all of the decisions for your children, but this does not allow them to grow their decision-making skills. Allow children to make simple decisions by giving them two choices. For instance, apple or pear; red socks or green socks.</td>
<td>Making healthy choices is a learned practice. Help your children practice decision-making skills by giving choice and sharing reflective questions to help guide them.</td>
<td>Teach your teens how to make healthy decisions by allowing them some independence to choose their path as well as to make mistakes along the way. In order for your teen to learn how to make decisions as an adult in a healthy way, they will need to be taught critical thinking skills, i.e. pros and cons.</td>
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**Discussion Starters:**
Teach your children about healthy decisions by practicing daily “Stop, Think, and Make a Good Choice.”

**STOP:**
- Take a moment and breathe.

**THINK:**
- Is this safe for me?
- Is this healthy for my body?
- Is this safe for my family?
- Is this safe for my home?

**MAKE A GOOD CHOICE:**
- Is this choice helpful or hurtful?
- How did I feel about this choice?
- Will I make the same choice again?

**Everyday Practice:**
Young children are by nature impulsive. They do not have the brain development for critical thinking yet. We can be their “brakes” to help them to stop and think.

For example: when choosing a cereal to buy with your children, typically children will choose a cereal because of the prize and if it tastes sweet. We can go through the “Stop, Think, and Make a Good Choice” skill to grow their critical thinking skills.

**Everyday Practice:**
Brainstorm responses for decision-making scenarios when you and your children are calm. Refer to one or more of the questions above to practice making decisions. For example, if your child is frustrated with someone’s actions, would hitting that person be right or wrong? Does hitting feel like the family values? How else might your child respond?

**Everyday Practice:**
Model everyday decision-making by talking with your child about how you make decisions. Allow teens to communicate how they make decisions. Practice decision-making situations that are relevant to your teen’s life. For example, what are some healthy boundaries for dating? How do these boundaries relate to the family’s values?
#3 Decision-Making:
How My Decisions Impact Myself and Others Now and in the Future

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#4 Decision-Making:
How to Be a Role Model

| **EARLY CHILDHOOD**  
  *(Birth-Age 5)* | **ELEMENTARY**  
  *(Kindergarten-Grade 6)* | **JUNIOR HIGH / HIGH SCHOOL**  
  *(Grade 7-Grade 12)* |
|---|---|---|
| **What Does this Skill Mean?**  
Children learn a great deal from watching you. Your children follow your example, good or bad, as a pattern for the way life is to be lived. | **What Does this Skill Mean?**  
Observing positive character traits can help children get a clear picture of what healthy behaviors “look like” and “sound like.” Talk with your children about characteristics in others that build healthy relationships. | **What Does this Skill Mean?**  
Teens encounter many different groups that have influence on their decision making process. Support your teens in selecting and becoming positive role models. |

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| Use encouragement to notice when your child uses a family value.  

1. I noticed that you ______.  
2. You chose the _____.
3. You looked excited the way you __.
4. You worked hard on____.
5. You knew____. | Ask children who their role model is (athlete, celebrity, action figure, teacher, neighbor, coach, family member, character in a book or movie, etc.)  

1. What traits do you like about that person? (Completes a task, honest, has courage, treats others with respect and kindness, changes game plan when makes a mistake, etc.)  
2. How can you show the same traits? (With family members, friends; with chores, school work, etc.) | Support your teens in selecting and becoming positive role models.  
Consider asking,  

1. What personality traits does your role model have that you admire?  
2. How do you incorporate those traits into your own life? |

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| Role model the behaviors that you want to see in your children. For example, you want the child to learn to apologize for mistakes. Role model apology skills often when you make a mistake. Children learn apology skills and that they have the power to recover from a mistake and make it right. | Model and teach children what positive character traits “look like or sound like” when interacting with others. Link the behavior with the character trait.  
For example, “I see you got your homework done on time; that is being dependable.”  
Or, “I heard you say something kind to your friend; that is being respectful.” | What inspires your teens? Explore how different people and ideas may serve as examples for your teens’ healthy decision-making. 
Ask, “What choices do you make daily to have a positive influence on your family (or your community)?” |
#5 Decision-Making: How to Find Alternatives to Unhealthy Behaviors

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<td><strong>What Does this Skill Mean?</strong></td>
<td>All of us have times in our lives when we make poor decisions. Practice thinking through different decision-making situations and brainstorm solutions together.</td>
<td>Help your teen to identify alternatives to unhealthy behaviors by modeling and coaching them through life’s difficult moments. Teens and adults often make poor decisions or engage in unhealthy behaviors when they are feeling stressed or overwhelmed. Negative thoughts are a common cause of stress.</td>
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<td>Use the word think/thinking: “You look like you are thinking really hard.” Use gestures to indicate thinking, i.e. place your hand on your forehead. Ask thinking questions, such as: “What are you thinking about?” Call attention to the thinking of others, such as: “Here’s what I think; Shall we find out what your Grandma thinks about it?” Invite children to explain their thinking out loud.</td>
<td>Brainstorm real-life situations when children have to make hard decisions (for example: someone at the playground takes your sweatshirt; a friend asks to copy your homework.)</td>
<td>Help your teens identify the motivation behind their behavior by first asking them: 1. How were you feeling when you made that decision? 2. Would you make that decision again? 3. How did that decision impact you? Our thoughts affect our feelings, which ultimately affect our behavior.</td>
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<td>Invite children to think of solutions to problems. For example, when a child’s brother takes her toy, she hits him. Spend some time asking what she could do instead. Give her some suggestions. Practice and try out the suggestions; then, re-evaluate.</td>
<td>Communicate with children that it is hard to make decisions. Schedule time to practice thinking of solutions to unhealthy decisions. Create a set of cards with examples of unhealthy decisions, i.e. cheating on a test. Place cards face down and have children draw a card and, as a family, brainstorm solutions.</td>
<td>It is important to share times that you made unhealthy decisions and what range of consequences you experienced. When your teens make a mistake, you can help by telling them that everyone makes mistakes, but we have to find things to do next time that will be a more positive choice. When teens make healthy decisions, praise and acknowledge them.</td>
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Family Tools offer age-appropriate conversation starters and everyday practices to help children build healthy social-emotional skills. Launched in 2016, Healthy Minds, Healthy Neighborhoods is part of the Heart of Illinois United Way’s Success By 6 and Supporting Student Success (S3) Initiatives. With more than 20 community partners, Healthy Minds, Healthy Neighborhoods provides neighborhood-based educational sessions addressing five key areas of social-emotional health.

**Mission:**
Strengthen children, families and communities by teaching coping skills.

**Goal:**
Educate, engage and equip local community members with “teach me what to do” strategies that promote positive behaviors for social-emotional health.

**Vision:**
Work together to build resilient communities.

**Audience:**
Parents/guardians, grandparents, caregivers, and neighborhood champions.

**Five Key Areas of Social-Emotional Health:**

- **Self-Regulation:** The ability to manage my feelings, thoughts, and behaviors in my home, school, and community.
- **Decision-Making:** The ability to make healthy and safe choices in my home, school, and community.
- **Self-Awareness:** The ability to recognize my feelings and their influence on my behavior in my home, school, and community.
- **Building Relationships:** The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships in my home, school, and community.
- **Social Awareness:** The ability to get along with others in my home, school, and community.

**Sponsored By:**

**Community-Generated Common Language to Help Parents and Caregivers Support Children with Coping Skills**

**Special thanks to the Healthy Minds, Healthy Neighborhoods Decision-Making Skills Writing Team:**

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Christy has worked with young children in poverty since 1994 and has been educating adults in a variety of capacities since 2007. She is passionate about helping others develop social-emotional skills that will impact the lives of children.

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Director at SAL Child Care Connection
Brenda works to strengthen and support the child care system so that families have access to affordable, quality early care and education in central Illinois.

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Children’s Home Association of Illinois
Christa is a clinician and former teacher who coordinates the provision mental health services for children and families within an educational setting.

**MINDI THIERER**
Social-Emotional Coach at Rogy’s Learning Place
Mindi began social-emotional coaching and training with Rogy’s in 2008. She feels passionate about positive social and emotional health among children and families as well as in our community. She also has three children ranging in age from 6 to 14 years of age and feels that having social-emotional skills is extremely important to their well-being.

**CAROL M. TIGGELAAR, MA, LCPC**
Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant at Caregiver Connections Children’s Home of Illinois
Carol provides social emotional consultation to early childhood educators to support the implementation of positive behavior interventions and strategies to improve the individual growth of the child.

To learn more, visit: www.hoiunitedway.org