



### **Opening Exercise: Choices, Mistakes, Failures & Successes**

**Directions:** Using this handout, try to do your best to come up with a real life example for each situation below. Be prepared to share about these situations below:

**1 – Describe a situation you faced where you made the wrong choice and afterward you felt *regret***

**2 – Describe another situation where you made a wrong choice and felt *guilty* later**

**3 – Describe a situation where you made a choice where the outcome was unexpected or funny**

**4- Can you think a choice that you made, that was the right choice that was *easy* for you?**

**5 – Did you ever make the right choice even though it was difficult to do?**

**6 – What is one of the best choices you ever made?**

**Finally, when considering your answers for 1-6:**

➤ ***How do you know when something is the “right” choice?***



**Making the “Right” Choice** - Often educational activities about decision-making skills involve a step by step way to make decisions. The following information is different as it involves looking directly at solutions

**What are the three key elements of a solution?** – Review the following elements of a good, positive choice.

### **It Passes the Conscience Test** (Consider your morals and values) –

This is listed first because it is so important yet so often ignored. Right away a choice should be eliminated if it goes against your morals, beliefs or strongly entrenched values. It may take practice to learn to listen to your conscience but it is worth it

- Example – If the problem is “I need a few thousand dollars to get my car fixed but I am broke” and the solution is “My grandmother is going on vacation and I know she has a ton of cash in her house that I could easily steal and she would probably not even notice” That may seem like a solution that would work but is it the right thing to do? Even if you could get away with it, could you live with yourself afterward?

#### **Questions for Discussion:**

- What are some things you would not do in your life now because you believe it is wrong for you? (What are some lines you would not cross?)
- Your conscience is that little voice in your head that tells you to do what is right, even when no one is looking. It can be a lot like a muscle and get weak when not used enough, or it can be strong when you are sure what you stand for. Do you think that you listen to your conscience or do you tend to just tune it out?

### **It’s Worth the Risk and Seems Beneficial**

In making choices there may often be some level of risk involved and some risks are worth taking, but some definitely are not. It is important to consider some of the following questions:

- *What’s at stake, particularly if this doesn’t work?* – Are there possible consequences? Is there a chance you can hurt yourself, those you care about, or others? Is there a chance you can get yourself into a situation that you can’t get out of?
- *If you make this choice is it really going to help?* Consider both the short term and the long term outcomes as sometimes a choice may seem good at first but with more thought it may actually be a bad idea. You may need to do research to find out more. Is this going truly going to make your life better? Will it work?

#### **Questions for Discussion:**

- Sometimes we need to take risks in order to get ahead, but being too risky can lead to regret. There should be a healthy balance when it comes to risk taking. Do you find yourself afraid to take the risks needed to make good choices or do you take too many risks?
- Are you fully aware of your short term and more importantly your long term goals? Do you have a good idea which direction you want your life to be headed? Do you have some idea what is best for yourself and for your loved ones right now?



## It's "Do-Able" and Affordable

Just about every decision carries a cost. The "cost" of your choices can be:

- ✓ **Financial** – Do you have the means to carry out your idea or will it break you financially?
- ✓ **Emotional** – Is there a chance that you will feel even worse if you make this choice? Will the stress and aggravation be too much to handle?
- ✓ **Physical** – Can your body handle it? Are you healthy enough for this choice?
- ✓ **Time** – Can you afford to put in the time needed to make your choice work?

In summary, ask yourself if your choice is **practical** and **realistic**.

- Example – "All of my problems would go away if I could just become a rich and famous basketball player... except that I am 40 years old with two bad knees"

### Question for Discussion:

- What resources do you have at your disposal that you may not be fully taking advantage of? Think about your situation. If you are still young, that in itself is a resource as you still have time on your side. Even if you are not young, what talents, skills, connections, creative ideas, and past learning experiences can you tap into in order to better your situation and expand your options today?

### Diagram: The Three Key Elements of the "Right Choice"

(A choice worth considering should have all three qualities)





**Practice** – Getting familiar with the elements of the “right” choices:

**Directions:** In each of the following scenarios, use the three elements of a solution to eliminate choices that you do not think would be right for **you** in each situation. If this is being done as a group, everyone may not agree which is OK.

Cross off choices that you don't think are the “right” choices using the following:

1. It fails the **conscience test** for you (You feel this choice is simply wrong based on your morals or values)
2. It is not **worth the risk** in your opinion
3. It does not seem “**do-able**” for you right now

Circle any choices leftover that you did not cross off that you would consider trying

**Problem Scenario** – “Clean and motivated but broke and unsure what to do with life going forward”

**Brainstorm choices for this problem:** *(The first three are already crossed off with explanations as examples)*

~~Pursue a childhood dream such as becoming a famous musician, rapper or sports star~~ – Not do-able

~~Plan and carry out a major robbery to get one big score and then hide out for a while~~ – Not worth the risk

~~Go to the bank and “borrow” the money needed from children’s savings account~~ – Fails conscience test

Deal drugs to make enough money to get started back on track

Get into a relationship with someone with money and sponge off of them for a while

Go out and get as many jobs as I can and just work like crazy

Just go back to getting high and ignore everything for a while

Go back to school and try to start a career

Move back in with parents to save money long enough to get ahead financially

Speak with a counselor to see if there are any potential government programs focused on career opportunities

Purposely violate probation to go to jail where at least financial worries will be gone for a while

See if there are any family members who will see that I am clean who can give me a chance to work with them

Just pack a bag, get in the car and take off and don't look back

Sit with my counselor and work on a budget to save money and then stick to it

Start small with a part time job and steadily work up from there

➤ **Discuss** – What choices are left? What would you decide to do for this problem?



Now try the same thing using a real or made up problem suggested by someone in the group.

**What is the Problem?** (Counselor should write the problem on the board)

**Brainstorm choices:** (As a group brainstorm potential solutions and list them on the board)

**Decide:** Which choices pass the **conscience test**, are **worth it**, and are **do-able**?

---

## Fine Tuning then Making a Decision

### Making the Final “Right Choice” – Using Your Personal “Filter” to Sort out What’s Left

Hopefully by this point the number of choices still on the table has been significantly weaned down to just a few. When “fine tuning” a final decision or choice, it is important to use your “filter” which consists of:

- Personal **wisdom and experience** – Consider how similar situations worked out for you in the past and take that into consideration. It is important to sort out what is thought- based and what is emotional. Making decisions based purely on emotion can have disastrous results. Try to be reasonable with yourself
- Your **beliefs**, which would include those ideas you put faith and trust in – Think about sources of wisdom that have worked for you in the past. This could include your spiritual beliefs or personally philosophy as well as readings or research you may have done, or even a simple but wise proverb or saying that could apply in this particular situation. Think about your personal conceptualization of faith and trust
- Your **support system** and the advice of others you value and trust (when available) – It is always good to ask one or two loyal, trusted and respected others just to get an outside perspective you may be missing. Your support system may see things that you are overlooking or choosing to ignore.

### Finally – (Last but not least) –Make your selection and **TAKE ACTION**

***A choice is useless if you don’t take action.*** Don’t let fear, procrastination, self-doubt or lack of focus hold you back. Your future self will wish you started taking the right action **today**. Consider the following:

- ❖ “A journey of 1000 miles starts with one step” – Chinese Proverb
  - ***What specifically do you need to do right now to get started with your choice?***
- ❖ “Inaction breeds doubt and fear. Action breeds confidence and courage. If you want to conquer fear, do not sit home and think about it. Go out and get busy.” - Dale Carnegie
  - ***What do you think that you may need in order to overcome fear, doubt, procrastination, or other obstacles that may get in your way?***
- ❖ “You must have long-range goals to keep you from being frustrated by short-range failures.” – Charles Noble
  - ***Specifically, what do you need to keep your mind focused in order to remain determined, persistent, resilient and motivated?***