



Dear Educator:

The news is full of stories about young people carrying guns to school, joining gangs, using drugs and pursuing many other risk behaviors. One reason that so many young people engage in these behaviors is that they feel powerless. Teens who suffer from low self-esteem tend to think that they are being moved by forces beyond their control, such as having to do whatever their friends want (or what they think their friends want). Helping your students develop their skills as decision makers is one of the best ways to prepare them to reject risk behaviors.

With experience and guidance in making decisions, your students can gain a new sense of confidence and self-direction. By learning to look at the consequences of their actions — particularly long-term consequences — they can begin to recognize that they have a strong measure of control over shaping the events in their lives.

This study guide is the second unit of the RIGHT DECISIONS, RIGHT NOW program which is designed to help students develop the capacity to make the decisions that are right for them. The program is funded by the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, which firmly believes that children should not smoke. Developed for use with students in grades 6-9, the activities help students examine the consequences, both immediate and future, that could result from the decisions they make.

We encourage you to share this exciting program with your colleagues. Although the materials are copyrighted, you have permission to make as many copies as you need for educational purposes.

Once you have had an opportunity to review the program, **please take a moment to complete and return the enclosed response card.** Your comments help us to create programs that continue to meet your needs. Returning this card also ensures your continued receipt of free educational programs.

Enjoy watching your students gain a sense of confidence and self-direction as they complete the activities in this program, learning to make the right decisions for themselves, right now!



INTRODUCTION

According to a 1990 study by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, *Adolescent Peer Pressure: Theory Correlates and Program Implications for Drug Abuse Prevention*, and other research, grades 6 and 7, in particular, are the most important grades for reaching students and preventing risk behaviors. By the time students reach grades 8 and 9, their doubts about their own identities and values makes the task more challenging.

This study guide is a continuation of the RIGHT DECISIONS, RIGHT NOW program. The materials and teaching suggestions are designed to improve students' decision-making skills by helping them focus on the immediate and future consequences of their decisions and the effect their decisions might have on other people.

The previous RIGHT DECISIONS, RIGHT NOW study guide emphasized the role of peer pressure and peer influence on the decisions young people make. You may wish to review these two forms of pressure before you begin this unit of the program.

- **Peer Pressure** — Adolescents may be taunted or teased into doing something they don't want to do or that they know is wrong. (E.g., "My friends smoke. They are pushing me to start. I don't want to be different, so I'll do it.")
- **Peer Influence** — Young people who engage in risk behaviors often do so because they assume they have to in order to be accepted, to be liked or to have and maintain friendships. No outside pressure is applied; instead, the individual creates an internal pressure out of the desire to fit in. (E.g., "The cool kids in school smoke. I want to be cool, too. I'll start smoking, so I can be like them.")

The previous materials also developed six mental steps involved in the deci-

sion-making process:

1. Identifying the conflict that makes a decision necessary.
2. Setting a goal.
3. Weighing the alternatives.
4. Considering the consequences of each alternative.
5. Arriving at a decision.
6. Reflecting on that decision.

In this unit of the RIGHT DECISIONS, RIGHT NOW program, students will review those steps and then concentrate on analyzing the short-term results and possible future consequences of the kinds of decisions they may face in the near future and beyond. The role of peer pressure and peer influence on those decisions will be analyzed as well.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

This program is designed to be used with students in grades 6–9 in social studies or health classes. The activities are developed to help students look beyond the immediate, and focus on the future consequences of their actions.

OBJECTIVES

This unit of the RIGHT DECISIONS, RIGHT NOW program is designed to help students:

- review the difference between peer pressure and peer influence.
- review and apply the mental steps involved in making a decision.
- recognize that most decisions have both short- and long-term consequences.
- identify ways in which their decisions can affect other people.
- analyze warning labels as sources of information about short- and long-term consequences of using specific products.
- examine a variety of risk behaviors in terms of immediate results and future consequences.
- identify sources of helpful information about the possible risks and consequences of important decisions.

- gain experience and confidence in making personal decisions.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

This program contains the following components:

1. This Teacher's Guide which includes:
 - A statement of program objectives.
 - Background information.
 - Suggestions for presenting each activity.
 - Ideas for extending each activity.
 - A list of resources.
2. Four Activity Masters to reproduce as individual worksheets for students.
3. A full-color poster that encourages students to think about the consequences of decisions they may make now.
4. A teacher response card which allows you to comment on the program. Return this card to ensure that you remain on our mailing list and receive future free educational programs.

USING THE PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Activity Masters

Use a photocopier or other school equipment to make copies of each Activity Master to serve as individual worksheets for students. The activities are presented in an effective learning sequence, but you may wish to change the sequence to meet the needs of your students.

Poster

Display the poster in a prominent place in the classroom, so that students can refer to it as they complete the program and as a reminder to them to consider the consequences of their decisions before they act—especially for those important, difficult decisions. Since the

poster contains many symbols, you might want to discuss them with students to be sure they have a clear understanding of what each symbol represents. For example: the gears represent the thinking that should go into making decisions; the question mark represents choices, the roads represent the journey through life, etc.

Encourage students to use the questions on the poster as a guide when making decisions. Thinking about the consequences of their decisions—both short- and long-term—before they act, can help them to make the right decisions, right now.

Activity

THE DECISION TRACK



Introduce this activity by reviewing the six mental steps involved in making a decision and list them on the chalkboard: 1. identifying the *conflict* (often referred to as “the occasion for making a decision”); 2. setting a *goal*; 3. weighing the *alternatives*; 4. considering *consequences*; 5. arriving at a *decision*; 6. *reflecting* on the decision. Remind students that our minds do not go through this process in a neat and orderly way. Instead, one step flows into another and sometimes we jump around from one to another and back again. In addition, we sometimes short-circuit the process and act on impulse or give in to outside pressure from friends. But, when we take the time to think about an important decision, knowing about the steps can make a big difference. In fact, some very successful people actually write out every step in the process when they are faced with a tough decision. (This practice may have originated with Benjamin Franklin.)

Part I

Distribute the activity sheets and have students define each of the steps in their own words. **Caution students**

not to write examples at this time.

Take time for students who may have questions or may want to talk about the process. As you finish the discussion about the steps involved in making a decision, point out the importance of going through the steps, especially reflecting on one’s decisions.

Explain that most of the life-shaping decisions we make can be reversed; if, upon reflection, a person does not feel right about a decision such as dropping out of school or experimenting with drugs, it is often possible to go back through the steps, rethinking the alternatives and the consequences. Even when a decision is made that results in negative consequences, young people can help stop them by going back through the process, making new decisions.

Part II

Take students through the process step by step, using the example of a student making the decision whether or not to begin smoking. Some of your students may have already made the decision to smoke. Without pointing fingers, you can use the Decision Path to talk about how students their age might come to this decision. Use the following questions and suggestions to initiate a discussion.

- What steps did they go through?
- How was peer pressure or peer influence likely to be involved?
- Then remind students that most decisions can be reversed. Suppose, for example, on reflection, a student is not happy with this decision. Elicit from students that by going through the steps in a reasonable manner, the person may come up with a different decision.

Extending the Activity

1. Use biographies or novels the students are reading to find examples of the decision-making process at work. Encourage students to identify the decision

and the factors that led a person to make an important, life-shaping decision. Working in pairs or small groups, students can even chart the steps involved in the individual’s decision path.

2. Invite an adult who would be a role model for your students to talk with the class about an experience in making a difficult decision. Ask the visitor to talk about what was involved in making a decision that might have been unpopular (not going along with the crowd) or that involved overcoming temptation (turning away from smoking or using alcohol or other drugs).
3. Encourage students to scan newspapers, looking for stories about young people who have achieved a goal. Then have students speculate about decisions these young people might have faced, what forces may have influenced them, etc.

Activity

THINK ABOUT TOMORROW



Most adolescents tend to think only about the immediate results of their decisions. If they do think about future consequences, their attitude is usually reflected in statements such as “It won’t happen to me” or “That’s a long time away.”

To get students thinking about future consequences, ask them what a parent or other adult means when giving a warning such as, “Think about the consequences.” Encourage students to give their own interpretations of the phrase and invite them to share examples of when they, or someone they know, heeded the warning or failed to heed it. You might give them a couple of examples to get them started. One example can be as simple as: “The weather forecast was for a cold front arriving later in the day. Jack heeded the warning and wore a

warm jacket. Later in the day, when the cold front arrived, Jack was glad he had heeded the warning.” A more critical example might be: “Sara went into the video store with some friends. She saw the cameras set up and read the sign that said ‘Shoplifters will be prosecuted.’ Sara ignored the warnings and stole a video. As she left the store, Sara was stopped by security. She was taken to the police station where she was arrested and her parents called. Sara was banned from the video store, grounded by her parents and ordered by the court to complete one hundred hours of community service.” Use the discussion to develop the idea that consequences can be immediate (you steal something and are caught), and they can also involve the future (having a police record or a reputation for dishonesty, which also have future consequences such as difficulty in obtaining jobs).

Part I

Divide the class into groups of three or four to complete the chart on the activity sheet. Before students begin, remind them that both immediate results and future consequences can be positive, negative or both.

When all groups have finished Part I, discuss the results. You can use the following questions as discussion starters:

- In what ways were the students’ responses similar?
- What differences emerged?
- In what ways did peer pressure or peer influence affect results?

In situations 1, 2, 4 and 6, students may feel that one immediate result was maintaining friends or a sense of belonging to the group. In situations 3 and 5, they are likely to say that the decision will be unpopular with friends. You might want to talk about the students’ responses to those two situations. Ask:

- Do you think the decision made was realistic?

- How difficult would it be in either situation to resist the pressure of friends?

Discuss the kinds of long-term consequences the groups came up with and how far into the future they carried their analysis. For example:

- Did any of the groups feel that a long-term risk of starting to smoke might be lung cancer, emphysema or heart disease?

Use the smoking example to introduce this important question:

- Why do young people who know what the future consequences might be still engage in risk behaviors like smoking?

Your students are likely to express a number of opinions, such as:

- giving in to the pressure of friends.
- kids don’t think about the future.
- they don’t think the consequences will affect them.
- they don’t care about the future.
- adults do it, so why can’t they?

Encourage discussion of the question as long as it seems profitable. The discussion itself will help some students realize that the decisions they make now can affect them far into the future.

Part II

Keep the class in the small groups to work on Part II, choosing two of the situations for each group to discuss. Students should use their imaginations in considering how others might be affected by their decisions. It is easy enough to think of how a parent or friend might be affected; encourage them to imagine beyond that. For example:

- Who would be hurt by the trashing of the buses?
- How might the joy ride lead to harm to others?

Groups can then take turns drawing webs on the chalkboard to show the other people who were affected by the decisions.

Extending the Activity

1. Allow students to choose any of the situations from Part I to write about. Encourage them to change negative decisions to positive decisions before writing. The writing might be a personal narrative, a short story or play with invented characters, a journal entry, or a letter.
2. Challenge the groups that worked together on this activity to design a television commercial that encourages young people to think about the future consequences of their decisions. Plans should include ideas for visual images, music or sound effects and narration. The class can vote on which commercial it thinks would be most effective.
3. Assign each group one of the situations from the activity sheet to role play for the class. Stress the importance of including reasons for their arguments. Encourage the groups to depict the situations realistically, with friends pointing out the immediate and long-term consequences to the main character.

Activity



CHECK THOSE WARNING LABELS

Certain products have potential risks associated with their use. Many companies that produce these products must, by law, warn the

**RIGHT DECISIONS
RIGHT NOW**

consumer about these risks. They do so by placing warning labels on these products. A sampling of these labels is included on the activity sheet.

Introduce the activity by asking students what kinds of warnings they commonly hear from parents or other adults. Have them distinguish between warnings about immediate consequences (E.g., “Put on sunscreen so you don’t get burned.”) and those involving the future (“You need good grades now if you want to go to college.”). Briefly discuss other warnings they see in the community, such as warnings about skate boarding, using a seatbelt and street traffic signs. Point out that, in many cases, the warning provides information about a potential risk, such as approaching a pedestrian crossing when you’re driving or that a store uses video cameras to prevent shoplifting.

Part I

As you distribute the activity sheets, tell students that other kinds of warnings can be found right in their own homes — in the form of warning labels on products that have potential risks to the consumer. As students begin Part I of the activity, tell them that they should answer for every product; if they are unsure of the type of product the warning label might be on, they should make their best guess. Also, in analyzing the labels, they should think in terms of both the immediate and long-range consequences. If students do have problems identifying the type of product, you might allow them to work in pairs or small groups.

Answers: After students have completed Part I of the activity, use their responses and the following ideas as the basis for discussion:

1. Product: alcoholic beverages. Note that both short-term and future consequences are given.

2. Product: cigarettes. While the warnings involve long-range consequences, you might ask the class what the short-term results of smoking are. Some of the smokers in the class may be surprised by the responses of the nonsmokers.
3. Product: cough medicine. Many over-the-counter medicines carry a similar warning.
4. Product: instant glue. Sniffing the fumes from glue or from various aerosol products has become a disturbingly common form of substance abuse among children. Misuse of these substances can have both immediate and lasting consequences.
5. Product: prescribed pain killers such as percodan or codeine. According to the *National Survey Result on Drug Use*, published in 1994 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the abuse of prescription medicines is a major problem area for drug addiction. Using prescription drugs illegally and in an abusive manner can have consequences such as dependency upon the drug and physical effects which can include convulsions or comas.
6. Product: electrical appliance. All electric tools and appliances like hair dryers carry warnings about the dangers of use near water.

Part II

Divide the class into groups to determine other products they feel should have warning labels. Encourage them to devise their own warning labels for those products.

Depending on the age and life experiences of your students, you might use the discussion to raise the question of why people their age would ignore such warning labels. As in the discussion of Activity 2, the question will elicit a variety of

responses. Talking about this can increase students’ awareness of the need to think through a decision before they act — to weigh any possible benefits against the short- and long-term consequences.

Extending the Activity

1. As a homework assignment, have students look for warning labels on products at home. They should copy the labels rather than bring any product to school. Encourage them to find warnings on products that have not been discussed — other kinds of medicines, plastic bags, microwave ovens and television sets or computers. Collect all warning label facsimiles and redistribute, challenging students to identify the products.
2. Divide the class into groups to brainstorm why it would be beneficial for them to make a habit of reading and heeding warning labels. Groups can then share their ideas with the rest of the class.
3. Have students prepare a debate on the topic of banning advertising on or for potentially risky products. Assign two groups to prepare arguments on opposite sides of the issue. Encourage students to cite references from magazine or newspaper articles when debating. Conduct the debate for the full class, with all students voting for or against the ban.

Activity



WEIGH THE CONSEQUENCES

Introduce the activity by explaining that students will now have the opportunity to examine the possible consequences of decisions they might face. Each student should choose one of the listed topics to work with,

but make sure that all on the list are dealt with, even if it means assigning topics. Point out that they will be completing the chart for a decision already made.

Part I

The discussion of Part I will help students recognize the value of thinking in terms of future consequences when they face a life-shaping decision, including the potential impact of the decision on others. Once students have completed their flow charts, use the following questions and ideas to guide discussion:

- What were the reasons for engaging in any of these actions? This is a good opportunity to reinforce the messages that have emerged about peer pressure and peer influence.
- What were some of the immediate results and long-term consequences of each decision? In terms of immediate results, did the person gain what he or she hoped by the action — eg, the approval of peers, feeling good (or high), feeling protected (by carrying a gun or joining a gang)? If so, how were these benefits offset by the long-term consequences?
- Suppose the person you wrote about had thought through the future consequences of the action. Do you think that person might have made a different decision? Why or why not? You can discuss this question in terms of the values the students hold. What value was the person guided by in making the decision? And what values are involved in considering future consequences? Try to draw out the idea that placing a high value on being accepted by peers can blind people to far more important values such as the kind of person they want to be, or what they want to do with their lives.
- Who else do you think would be affected by the decision and how might they be affected?

Encourage the students to think beyond those in the person's immediate circle. Consider, for example, the accidental shootings that result from kids carrying guns or the victims of automobile accidents involving cars driven by youth without licenses or those driving after drinking.

Part II

Have students complete Part II of the activity for the decision they worked on in Part I. You may want to have them research sources of information — using library resources or discussing possibilities with parents, a guidance counselor or a school psychologist.

Discuss the lists in class. Note the extent to which the students rely on friends — or don't rely on them. Students are not likely to include their peer group as a source of information about risks or consequences. Talk about the irony of allowing this group to have a powerful influence on their decisions.

Extending the Activity

1. Show the class a video dealing with future consequences. There are a number of good ones focusing on substance abuse. *Fast Forward Future* is most suitable for grades 6-7, while *Straight at Ya* is useful with grades 8-9. Both are among a series of programs developed by the U.S. Department of Education and can be borrowed from the Department's Regional Centers. For the address of your Regional Center, write to the U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C. 20202 or contact your state education department.
2. Have students develop their own play on the topic of "Weigh the Consequences." Encourage them to think in terms of creating a

drama for students two or three years younger than themselves. The process itself will reinforce the learning that has taken place by challenging students to put the ideas in their own words. Polished plays can be video-taped or presented in live performances for lower grades.

3. Invite a speaker such as a social worker, principal, guidance counselor, psychologist or police official to speak to the class about local places they can contact for information to help make them better prepared for making important decisions.

Resources

- L.D. Johnson, *Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of the Lifestyles and Values of Youth*, Ann Arbor, MI, Institute for Social Research, 1995.
- National Institute on Drug Abuse, Department of Human Services, Rockville, MD.
- Joyce Tobias, *Kids and Drugs*, Annandale, VA, PANDAA Press, 1987.
- The Rand Corporation, *Teens in Action: Creating a Drug-Free Future for America's Youth*, Rockville, MD, National Institute on Drug Abuse, 1985.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *National Survey Result on Drug Use*, Rockville, MD, Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration, 1994.



**RIGHT
DECISIONS
RIGHT
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