

Module 3



Duration: 55 minutes

Determining Your Direction

This module is designed to help students understand that decisions can be made by applying a process, and that learning this process is critical to making all important decisions in life, including those about career choices.

Objectives

At the end of this module, students will be able to:

- Describe different kinds of decision-making strategies.
- State the steps of a planful model of decision making.
- Apply the planful model to personal career decision making.

Module 3: Overview

Components

- **Discussion: Decisions and Decision Strategies**
15 minutes
- **Discussion:**
“Decision Making in My Life” Homework
15 minutes
- **Mini-Lecture: Decision Making and Handout 2: Arriving at a Decision**
25 minutes

Facilitator Preparation

- Read the lesson plan and resource material.
- Duplicate materials for [Handout 2: Arriving at a Decision](#) and [Activity 7: Connecting Life Roles](#).
- Make arrangements to show the PowerPoint presentation. This presentation can be accessed online from the ADMS.

Homework Assignments

Have students write a one- or two-page description of themselves from the following three different perspectives or viewpoints:

- How their parents/guardians see them.
- How their friends see them.
- How their teachers see them.

These three images may be similar to each other or may be quite different.

Using [Activity 7: Connecting Life Roles](#), ask students to interview a parent or other adult about different life roles they play. Students should complete the worksheet and bring it to the next class session.

National Career Development Guidelines Addressed

- Indicator CM1K3: Identify your short-term and long-term career goals.
- Indicator CM2.A2: Demonstrate the use of a decision-making model.
- Indicator CM1.K1: Recognize that career planning to attain your career goals is a lifelong process.
- Indicator CM2A1: Give examples of past decisions that demonstrate your decision-making style.
- Indicator CM2.A2: Demonstrate the use of a decision-making model.
- Indicator CM2.A4: Show how exploring options affected a decision you made.
- Indicator CM2K4: Identify alternative options and potential consequences for a specific decision.

ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success Addressed

- B-LS 1. Demonstrate critical-thinking skills to make informed decisions.
- B-LS 9. Gather evidence and consider multiple perspectives to make informed decisions.
- B-SMS 7. Demonstrate effective coping skills when faced with a problem.

Module 3: Lesson Plan



SLIDES 3-1 AND 3-2

Introduction

Every day you make many choices such as: what to eat, what to wear, whether to do your homework, which television programs to watch, which friends to choose, and what to do with your time. Each of these seemingly small choices is a part of a chain of choices, and each has outcomes, either positive or negative. These choices develop into events that are added to your personal logbook. To ensure that choices are positive (and not negative), you need to learn more about decision making.

Discussion: Decisions and Decision Strategies

(15 minutes)

Engage students in this topic by asking questions such as the following:

- **What is a decision?** The selection of one option rather than others that are available.
- **What are alternatives?** Different ways in which a problem may be solved or a goal may be reached.
- **On what basis should we select one alternative rather than another?** It helps us reach a goal or solve a problem; it expresses our values better than other alternatives; we believe that the outcome, or result, of the decision will be better for us.
- **What is a goal?** An event, condition, or outcome that we set for some future date.
- **How does a lack of goals affect decision making?** If there is no target or desired outcome, it is impossible to identify alternatives.
- **What are consequences?** They are the results or outcomes of reaching a decision.
- **Do all decisions have the same level of importance?** No, because some decisions, such as what to eat for dinner or which movie to watch on television, are so trivial that the outcomes or consequences of the choice are not very important.
- **What are some examples of small decisions that are not likely to have a significant effect on you?**
- **What are some examples of big decisions that are likely to have a significant effect on you?**



SLIDES 3-3 AND 3-4

Discussion: “Decision Making in My Life” Homework

(15 minutes)

Your homework for today was to list five decisions you have made, along with their alternatives, information considered, and the results (or consequences) of each. Describe one of those decisions.

As students describe decisions and their consequences, point out that:

- The possible outcomes of some decisions are more critical than others.
- The more important the outcomes, the more we should use a planful model of decision making.
- Desired outcomes are more likely to occur when a planful process of decision making is used.
- Using a planful process does not always ensure the consequences we desire, though it increases the probability of desired outcomes.



SLIDES 3-5 AND 3-6

Mini-Lecture: Decision Making and Handout 2: Arriving at a Decision

(25 minutes)

The examples you have given illustrate the fact that there are different ways in which we can face decisions. We could summarize them in five categories.

- **Planful** – A step-by-step process is used to identify alternatives and to choose one.
- **Painful** – A lot of time and energy are spent, but a choice is not made.
- **Impulsive** – A choice is made without adequately finding alternatives or collecting information about the self and alternatives.
- **Compliant** – The choice is made for you by someone else, with your permission.
- **Delaying** – The need for decision making is not recognized or, if recognized, it is put off for some future date.

*Let’s take a look at each of these five strategies, beginning with the **Planful Decision-Making Model**. Since all decisions are not equally important (what you wear today as opposed to choosing high school courses), we will only consider the process used for important decisions. In this model, the decider is aware that a decision needs to be made and gets in motion to accomplish this by following a sequence of steps.*

Step 1: Identify the decision to be made – that is, the reason for a decision and what it is that you want to achieve either through solving a problem or reaching some future goal.

Step 2: Consider characteristics about yourself that need to be woven into the decision-making process.

Step 3: Identify alternatives for solving the problem or reaching the goal.

Step 4: Collect information about each alternative in order to be as fully informed as possible.

Step 5: Put alternatives in priority order based on the information gained.

Step 6: Take action on the steps needed to put the highest-priority alternative into effect.

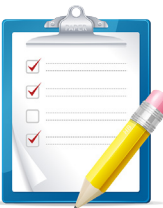
Step 7: Review the decision and possible outcomes to determine whether they have met your needs.



ACTIVITY 4

Now, think about the decisions that you wrote down on your homework assignment. How did you make those decisions?

Get feedback from the students about the process they used when completing [Activity 4: Decision Making in My Life](#). Then, distribute [Handout 2: Arriving at a Decision](#).



HANDOUT 2

Sometimes a decision is really hard to make. It is good to have a process to help us make a good decision. Pretend that you are the student in this example, and we will go through the planful process.

You have been invited to go to the movies this Saturday with some kids in your class. You are new in the school and have really wanted to be a part of that group. You know that it will improve your status with all of your classmates if you go. However, the movie is at the same time as a party being given for your grandparents in honor of their 40th wedding anniversary. You love your grandparents and wouldn't want to hurt their feelings, but you know that there will be a lot of people at the party and you wouldn't be missed. You also know that your parents would have a fit if you said that you didn't want to go. On the other hand, if you don't go with your friends, you may not be asked again. What should you do?

Step 1: Identify the decision to be made.

What to do on Saturday.

Step 2: Consider characteristics of self.

Want to make friends. Love your grandparents. Would feel guilty if you go to the movie, but miserable if you go to the party.

Step 3: Identify alternatives.

Encourage the students to come up with as many alternatives as possible without judging them at this time. Some examples you may get from students include the following:

- Go to the party and explain to your friends why you can't go with them.
- Go to the movie and face your parents' anger.
- Explain the situation to your parents and ask for help.
- Tell your parents that you feel sick and stay home until they leave, then go to the movie.
- Go to the party, hug your grandparents, and then sneak out.
- Go to the movie, leave early, and show up at the party.

Step 4: Collect information about each alternative.

Have students consider the consequences of each alternative suggested.

Step 5: Put alternatives in priority order.

Have students do this.

Step 6: Take action.

The action taken will depend on the alternative chosen.

Step 7: Review the decision and possible outcomes.

Was this a good decision? If not, why?

These steps will later be applied to your personal career decision making, but now let's look at the other common models of decision making.



SLIDES 3-5

A second model of decision-making might be called **Painful**. Characteristics of this model include the following:

- A lot of time and perhaps emotion is spent in identifying alternatives and in collecting information about one's self and the alternatives.
- The person using this model never reaches Step 5; in other words, a choice is never made.
- Because the person does not make a choice, one is often forced upon him or her because it is made by someone else or left to happenstance.

A third model might be called **Impulsive**. This style describes a person who chooses a car, a house, a high school curriculum, or an occupation without following the planful process. In other words, impulsive deciders jump from Step 1 to Step 6. This model is characterized by the following:

- The problem that needs to be solved, or the goal that should be attained, may not be sufficiently understood.
- There may be lack of attention to personal strengths, weaknesses, and goals related to making the decision.
- A smaller number of alternatives are considered than could be the case.
- Little or insufficient information is collected about the alternatives.
- A decision is reached quickly but may not produce the desired outcome.

A fourth model is called **Compliant**. In this model, an individual allows someone else to make a decision in his or her place. Thus, a decision is made at Step 6 without direct participation in Step 2 through Step 5 of the person who has to live with the consequences. Though this model may be necessary at times because of the authority of the person who makes the decision, as a general pattern it robs individuals of the responsibility and right to control their own lives. Characteristics of this model include:

- The decider does not select the alternatives or have the benefit of collecting data related to them.
- The decider does not "own" the decision and therefore may not commit to it fully.
- The decider loses the opportunity to chart his or her own course.

Finally, there is a model we might call **Delaying**. In this model, people do not face a decision, but instead put it off for some future date. A person may delay a decision because they do not recognize that they need to make a choice, are afraid to make it, do not know how to identify alternatives, or are not willing to give the time and energy it takes to do so. This model has these characteristics:

- A choice is never consciously made by the decider.
- Circumstances or other people may make the choice for the decider.
- The decider may lose control over his or her life when giving up the opportunity to direct it.
- The outcomes may not be those desired by the decision maker.

There is a relationship between the importance of a decision and the style we may choose to use when considering it. It would be boring to apply the Planful Decision-Making Model when choosing a meal in a restaurant or a new outfit. Since the stakes are not high in these decisions, it would be fine to be impulsive or even painful on occasion. When choosing a friend, high school curriculum, postsecondary school, or career path, using a planful process is highly desirable.



SLIDES 3-7

Homework Assignments

Write a one- or two-page description of yourself from three different perspectives or viewpoints:

- How your parent or guardian sees you.
- How your friends see you.
- How your teachers see you.



ACTIVITY 7

These three images may be similar to each other or they may be quite different.

Using Activity 7: Connecting Life Roles, interview one of your parents or another adult about different life roles they play. You should complete the worksheet and bring it to the next class session.

Optional Activities

1. Ask students to draw or describe in words the process they use most frequently to make important decisions. Next, have students come up with a real-life decision that is important to them. Then, have the students go through the planful process, listing as many alternatives as possible. Use the brainstorming technique in which every alternative is considered without placing value on it at this time. Encourage outrageous alternatives to open their minds to all possibilities.
2. Use the worksheet [Vignette for Optional Activity](#) to engage students in a real-life decision-making situation.

Module 3: Resource Material

Some decision-making theorists are predicting that change will be so rapid in the 21st century that systematic decision-making models will no longer serve us well – that we will have limited alternatives or time for long-range planning, and that we will simply be faced with taking the best of limited alternatives. This author believes, however, that in the 21st century, as in the 20th century, individuals will be able to control their futures through planful, thoughtful decision strategies, though it may be necessary to apply them more often. It is my goal to help you teach that process to students.

The Vocabulary of Decision Making

Common words related to decision making are goals, alternatives, valuing, and outcomes.

Goals are what deciders consider to be the desired outcome(s) of making a decision. Sample goals might be to:

- Earn all A's this year.
- Make a good four-year high school plan.
- Choose an affordable school that also offers quality training for the occupation I want to enter.
- Choose an occupation that I would really enjoy.
- Select the best courses or major(s) to prepare me for my occupation.
- Find a job that offers good fringe benefits, pays at least the average national wage, and can be entered after a two-year community college program.

Sometimes the most difficult part of decision making is to state the goal(s) clearly. The goal needs to state the desired end result and perhaps some qualifying statements (such as “a school that offers quality training,” or “a school that I would really enjoy,” etc.). Obviously, if the goal is not clearly stated, it will be difficult to identify alternatives that could help reach it.

Alternatives are the possible ways we can find or create to allow us to reach the goal(s). Unless there are two or more alternatives, there is no freedom of choice or need for decision making. With many decisions it is impossible to identify all of the alternatives. Thus, with most decisions we need to develop a manageable number, perhaps two to five good alternatives.

Valuing is a process whereby each alternative is thoroughly examined in order to determine how completely and at what physical, mental, or financial cost it may help the decider to reach the stated goal(s).

Outcomes (consequences) are the results experienced after selecting an alternative and implementing it. We hope the outcomes are the same or very near the definition of the goal(s). If so, we would say that the outcomes are positive. If the outcomes do not get us to the desired goal, we will likely say that the outcomes are negative. A good decision is one in which the planful decision-making process has been used, even if the outcomes are negative. Using a planful process does not guarantee positive outcomes, but it does increase their probability.

Types of Decisions

Nearly every decision falls into one of the following three categories:

Decisions with certainty: The alternatives and their outcomes are clearly known.

Example: When you get to the stoplight at the bottom of the hill, you can either continue straight or turn left. If you go straight, you will come to the center of town in 1.8 miles. If you turn left, you will leave town and come to Interstate 99 in 4.3 miles.

Decisions with measured risk: The outcomes of each alternative are not totally known, but something is known about the probability (chances out of 10) or likelihood that a given consequence will occur.

Example: You can attend either of two local colleges: State University or City Community College. If you go to State University, you have six chances out of 10 of getting a “C” average or better in your freshman year, based on your ACT®/SAT® scores. If you go to City Community College, you have eight chances out of 10 of getting a C average.

Decisions with uncertainty: The outcomes of the alternatives are totally or almost totally unknown.

Example: While you are visiting an unfamiliar city, your car breaks down. You know no one to recommend a mechanic, and you must select one from many listed in your GPS. You have no information about any of them, which would help predict the possible outcomes of cost, quality of work, or time required.

There are relatively few decisions in life, including career planning decisions, of the first type. Most of our important decisions are of the second type because it is possible to get enough information to make some kind of prediction about the capability of each alternative to produce the desired outcomes. When we face decisions of the third type, it is wise to work hard to gather enough information to be able to categorize the decision as one with measured risk rather than one with uncertainty.

Just as there are different types of decisions, there are also different types of decision-making strategies – such as planful, intuitive, impulsive, compliant, paralytic, delaying, and fatalistic. The strategies we use depend a great deal upon the type of decision involved. Certain decision-making styles are more likely than others to be used with each of the three categories of decisions.

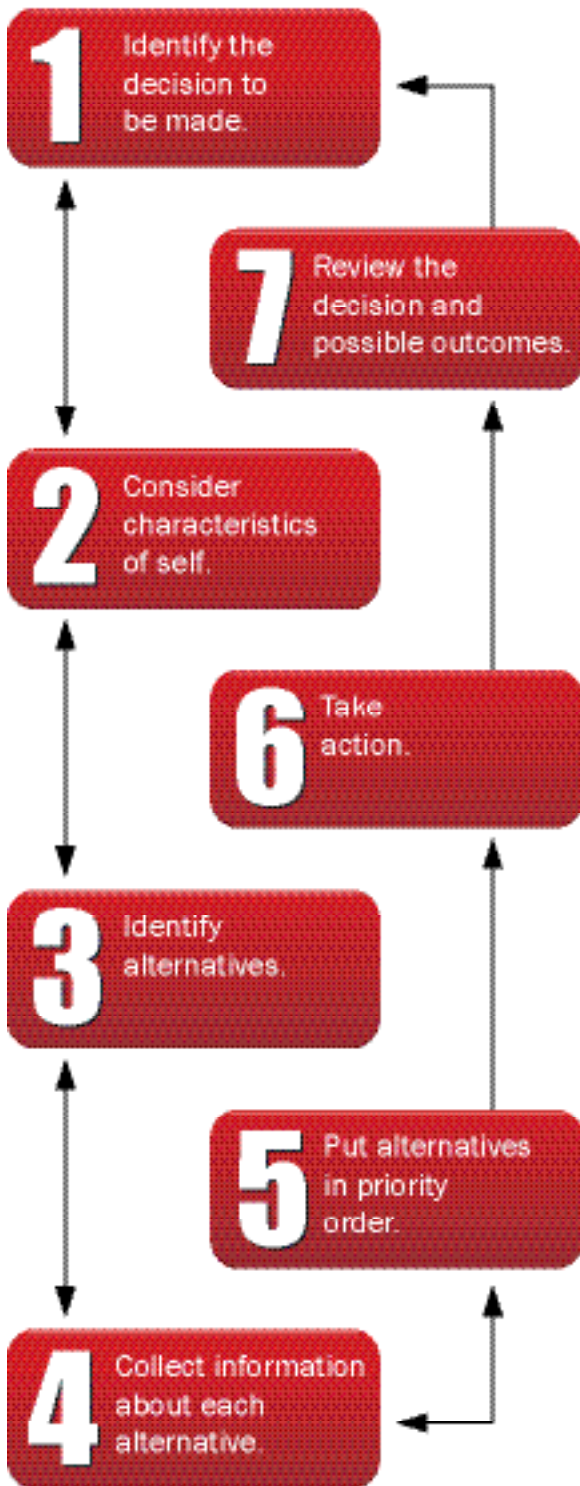
The Planful Decision-Making Model

The style of decision making appropriate for a given occasion should relate directly to the type of decision and to the severity or importance of the possible outcomes. Using an impulsive strategy for decisions such as choice of dinner entree or buying a new garment adds spice to life, and has relatively short-term and unimportant consequences. A well-thought-out or planful process, however, is desirable in decisions with possibly heavy consequences, such as buying a house, choosing a vocation, or selecting a partner.

The more carefully one considers a decision and collects information, the less likely it is to be a decision with uncertainty. Many decisions appear to have great elements of risk or uncertainty at first glance. When the facts are gathered, however, and the evidence weighed - as is done in the [Planful Decision-Making Process](#) - one may find the decision to be far less risky or uncertain than first believed. Although the planful process does not guarantee desired outcomes, it can reduce uncertainty and the element of risk in decision making.

Planful Decision-Making Model

Figure 3.1



There are seven steps in the Planful Decision-Making Model (as illustrated in Figure 3.1):

Step 1: Identify the decision to be made.

In this step, the decider realizes a decision must be made. This awareness may be triggered by a variety of events, such as the need to choose high school courses or pressure from friends and family to make a vocational choice.

Step 2: Consider characteristics of self.

In this step, the decider may shape personal goals, identify strengths and barriers that impact the decision-making process, or consider interests, abilities, and values.

Step 3: Identify alternatives.

At this step, the decider identifies two or more possible paths of action, or alternatives. She or he may also use imagination and information to construct new, unique alternatives. Then, the decider lists two to five possible and desirable ones.

Step 4: Collect information about each alternative.

Most decisions require the collection of pertinent information. The real challenge in this step is to know what information is needed, the best places to acquire it, and how to go about getting it. Having already considered self-information in Step 2, this step speaks to a collection of information from external sources – from books, people, the Internet, and/or a variety of other sources.

Step 5: Put alternatives in priority order.

In this step, the decider draws on information and emotions to imagine what it would be like if each alternative were played out to the end. The decider must evaluate whether the problem, need, or goal identified in Step 1 would be solved or met through each alternative. In going through this difficult internal process, one begins to favor alternatives that appear to have higher potential for solving the problem or reaching the goal(s).

Eventually, the decider is able to place alternatives in priority order, based upon a personal valuing system.

Once the decider has weighed all the information, she or he is ready to select the alternative that seems to have the highest probability of meeting the identified goal(s). This choice is likely to be the same or similar to the alternative that was placed at the top of the list.

Step 6: Take action.

At this point the decider takes some “real-life” action and begins to implement the alternative selected in Step 5. Until this point, the decision-making work has been exploratory and tentative. In this step, the process takes place in the real world and moves toward a state of finality.

Step 7: Review the decision and possible outcomes.

In this last step, the decider experiences the results of the decision and evaluates whether or not it has “solved” the problem or met the goal(s) identified in Step 1. If it has met the goal(s), the decider may stay with this decision to its completion or for a longer period of time. If, however, the decision has not satisfied the conditions specified in Step 1, the decider may go back to previous steps of the process – identifying new alternatives, reevaluating others on the original list, or collecting more information.

Notice that deciders may go forward and backward between Steps 1-5. At Step 6, however, a specific action takes place with its associated outcomes in Step 7, and progress becomes one-way.

Other Decision-Making Strategies

The Planful Decision-Making Model is highly recommended for all of life’s decisions in which the stakes are high and the financial or emotional cost of making an uninformed decision is significant. Other styles, as described below, have varying degrees of utility, dependent upon the specific situation and the magnitude of the consequences.

Painful: Spending much time and thought identifying alternatives, gathering information, and weighing alternatives. The decider gets lost in Steps 2-5 of the Planful Decision-Making Model and never advances to Step 6. (“I just can’t make up my mind.”)

Impulsive: Taking the first alternative available without looking at other alternatives or collecting information. Those who use this strategy operate from emotion and move quickly to Step 6. (“Decide now, think later.”)

Compliant: Going along with the plans of someone else rather than making an independent decision. (“If it’s OK with you, it’s OK with me.”)

Delaying: Postponing thought and action on a problem until later. The decider never even gets to Step 1 on the Planful Decision-Making Model. (“I’ll think about that later.”)

As you look over the descriptions of the different decision-making strategies, notice that two strategies – Planful and Painful – sound very similar. The basic difference, however, is that all of the steps in the decision-making process are followed in the Planful Decision-Making Model, resulting in an action that is taken to satisfy the identified goal. The Painful strategy, by contrast, never gets the decider beyond Step 5.

Look over the definitions again. Notice that two strategies – Impulsive and Compliant – result in immediate action without much thought. Either of these strategies will lead to an immediate choice, probably followed by an action. In the Impulsive model, the decider defines a problem (or may not even take time to do that) and jumps directly to action (Step 6) without identifying alternatives, collecting information to predict outcomes, or systematically eliminating alternatives. The Impulsive strategy bases action purely upon a spontaneous emotional reaction.

With the Compliant strategy, the decider allows someone else or some circumstance to dictate the decision. Thus, the decider does not have to think, identify alternatives, collect information, or prioritize alternatives. An alternative is easily chosen, but the decider has to accept the outcomes of a choice made by someone else. This strategy may be polite to use at selected times, but as a habitual pattern of decision making, it has the effect of giving up the right and responsibility to manage one’s own life and career.

The Delaying strategy gets the decider precisely nowhere. The decider who uses this approach may not believe that he or she can have any control over life, that decision making is too risky or frightening, or that deciding can be put off indefinitely. Clearly this is not a thoughtful strategy and produces no immediate results. The result of the Delaying strategy is the same as that of the Compliant strategy – control is handed over to someone or something outside of the individual.

The student needs to understand that all decisions are not equally important; however, when decisions are being made that will impact the future, it is highly desirable to use the Planful Decision-Making Model.



Handout 2: Arriving at a Decision

The Planful Model

Step 1: Identify the decision to be made, or in other words, the reason for a decision and what it is that you want to achieve either through solving a problem or reaching some future goal(s).

Step 2: Consider characteristics about yourself that need to be woven into the decision-making process.

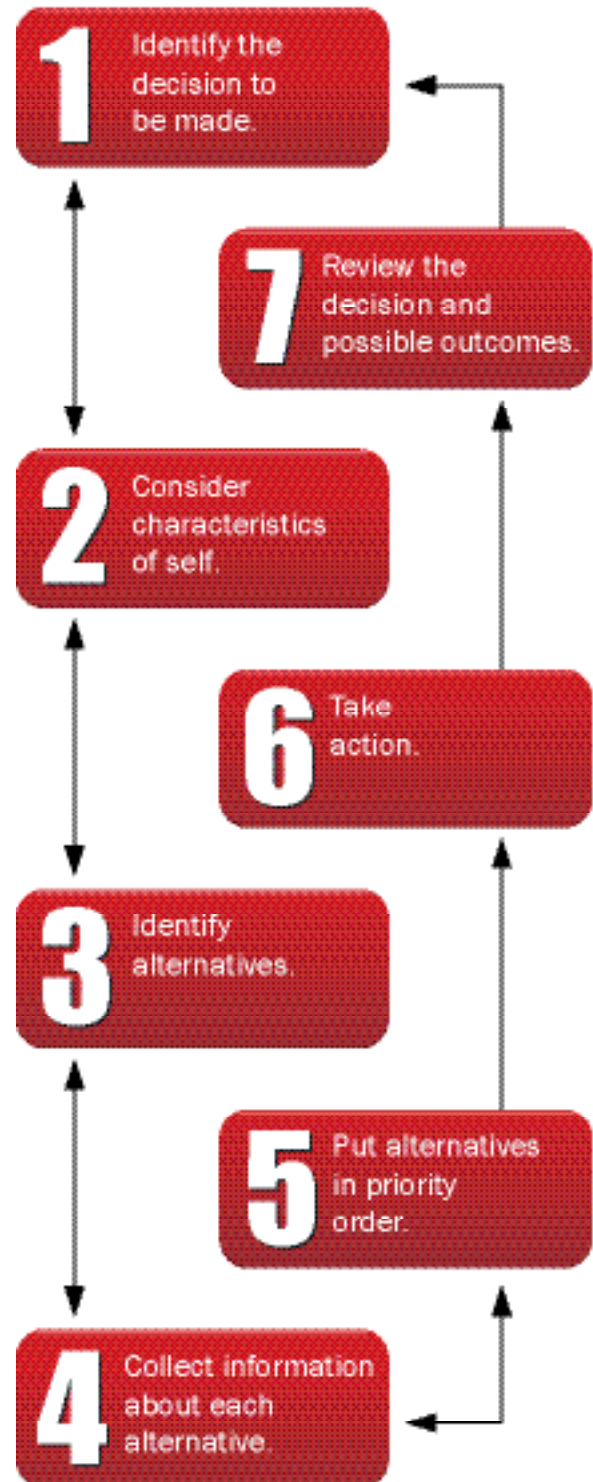
Step 3: Identify as many alternatives for solving the problem or reaching the goal(s) as you can.

Step 4: Collect information about each alternative in order to be as fully informed about each as possible.

Step 5: Put alternatives in priority order, based on the information gained.

Step 6: Take action on the steps needed to put the highest-priority alternative into effect.

Step 7: Review the decision and possible outcomes to determine whether the outcomes of the decision have met your needs.



Name _____

Date _____



Activity 7: Connecting Life Roles

Each of us plays many roles in life – student, son/daughter, sibling, friend, volunteer. These roles combined make up our career. Sometimes we may feel stressed from playing too many roles. To get an idea of the many roles you may play as an adult, interview a parent or other adult about the life roles he or she is playing and the general kinds of activities included in each.

Life Role	Activities
Parent	
Son/Daughter	
Worker	
Volunteer	
Spouse/Partner	
Friend	
Homemaker	
Other	

Do these activities ever conflict with each other? How was the situation resolved?

Name _____

Date _____



Vignette for Optional Activity

Ginny was having lunch with her friends in the school cafeteria at Suburban High today when she overheard the conversation of two male students seated at the table behind her. Keith, who is in her English class, was telling Bud about how he had received an A on a recent theme assigned for English class. He went on to say his older sister is an English major in college and he had convinced her to write the paper for him while she was home for a visit.

Suburban High has an honor code that states students will be honest about their work and will report cases they know about in which the honor code has been broken. Such cases are investigated by a committee made up of the assistant principal, two teachers, and two students. If the charge is supported by evidence, students who break the honor code may be suspended.

What are Ginny's alternatives for this situation? In the spaces below, write her alternatives in the left column. In the right column, make notes about what the possible outcome(s) of each alternative.

Ginny's Alternatives	Possible Outcomes?
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	