

## **Decision, Decisions, Decisions**

### **Parenting Strategies – April 2009**

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College presents multiple opportunities, during each year, for your child to practice and hone his or her decision making skills. ***So what kind of decision maker do you desire your son or daughter to be... and what role do you want to have?***

The month of April in particular presents opportunities for students in all phases of their education to make decisions. On this particular day, as I gazed out my window I was struck by the number of accepted students and their family members touring the campus to once more weigh the pros and cons of attending the college. Within my office too I had seen a number of students who were in decision making mode. Some were considering which classes to take for next semester and others were considering in which disciplines to major or minor. Sprinkled in were seniors who were determining to which organizations they wanted to send their résumés. It is always interesting to observe the many decision making models being tried and tested; some with success, many with frustration, and others with great hesitancy.

Some of my current students operate with an air of independence, while others agonize in anticipation of how a family member might react to a specific decision. Some students are tempted to pick-up the phone to call home in hopes of being told what to do, and others ask for advice about how to best approach a conversation with a family member. Sometimes, on those accepted student visiting days, family members are huddled around the prospective student and the decision making is palpable!

Consider taking time to think about the skills and qualities that you would like your child to strengthen or develop around the decision making process. Be specific too about identifying your desired role.

There are obviously many different types of decision making strategies for varied circumstances. Sometimes a decision can be pondered and at other times it requires quick action. As an example, there is likely a deadline for declaring a major, but the student can be thinking about which major to choose well in advance. Addressing a failing grade, however, will likely require a much quicker decision in order to determine how best to get assistance.

There is a saying that states, *"If you are not confused you are not well informed."* **So are you willing to let your son or daughter experience confusion as they make decisions?** If "yes," then let's consider a process to support your child in his or her decision making:

1. Have your child identify the problem, opportunity, or circumstance.
2. Acknowledge the emotions your child is expressing – demonstrate that you understand that he or she is feeling a particular way.
3. Listen more than talk while your child expresses what is going on.
4. Prompt your child to share different possibilities – the resources that exist, what they have heard from others; what they feel in their gut would work best.
5. Have your child write down or talk about the pros and cons of the different possibilities.
6. Ask your child if they think they need more information to make a good decision. If they do, ask where or with whom the information might reside?
7. Ask your child if or when they would like your thoughts.
8. Have your child identify the desired outcome(s).
9. Encourage your child to converge on a solution and series of next steps.
10. Agree to revisit the decision, in a designated amount of time, when a particular strategy does not seem to be working.
11. Reinforce what you noticed worked well and which parts of the process could be applied to other decision making situations.

A child who becomes more competent in his or her decision making skills becomes more involved and invested in the outcomes of his or her educational experience. The child will confidently navigate both the anticipated and unanticipated opportunities for decision making that occur during the college years; seeing the possibilities as opportunities and tackling the challenges with tested strategies. As a parent:

*Resist the urge to impose solutions;*  
give your child opportunities to wrestle with options.

*Resist the urge to smooth the journey;*  
allow your child time to move through confusion.

*Resist the urge to ease the annoyance;*  
provide support as your child learns from failure.

*Resist the urge to say what you would have done;*  
encourage your child as they revise their strategies.

*And celebrate your parenting success as your child experiences the satisfaction of having decided what they want to do.*