




DECISION MAKING

What Matters Most?

“Good decisions don’t make life easy, but they do make it easier.”

–Coach Larry Gelwix, Forever Strong



TEACHER NOTES

All of the other SEL skills, learned well and practiced regularly, create the conditions for us to make responsible decisions, whether others are watching us or not. Two elements that are very beneficial when learning to make positive, effective decisions are: (1) knowing why and how to make healthy choices even when it’s hard, and (2) building a “Pause Power” strategy that allows our brains time to make that choice.



DURATION: (30 minutes)

GOALS: [Teacher and Student goals](#)

MATERIALS

- Board or chart paper for capturing group brainstorm
- Optional: Big, brightly-colored, circular paper “spots” for recording student ideas
- Optional: Quiet music for during private think time



MAIN POINTS: Introduce “What Matters Most” lesson (3 minutes)

- We all make lots of decisions every day, and we have the choice to make ones that will help us be healthier, happier, and more successful in relationships and in our work.
- Thinking carefully about why we make the choices we do is important, especially when the choices are difficult.
- Building a habit of pausing and reflecting before acting pays off in the long run, helping us make decisions that are less impulsive and more in line with our core values.



GUIDING LANGUAGE

This lesson will help you make important decisions that are about what really matters most to you, and that are good for everyone’s learning—which is our number one job at school. When we think about what works best for us as we learn in our classroom, and what we value the most about how we work together, we can practice making decisions to act that way that every day. Together, we’ll make a brainstorm web about ways we can act that show what we value about learning together in our classroom – things that make it easier for everyone to relax and concentrate and learn.



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First, we'll spend some time thinking about what matters most to each of us. Then we'll practice developing our "Pause Power"—taking a moment before making a decision to remember what matters most to us. Learning to use our Pause Power will help us be thoughtful and strong when we make daily decisions that affect us and other people. Practicing stopping on purpose, to pause between what we're feeling or thinking, and our decision of how we act on those thoughts or feelings, builds pausing as a habit in our brains. That makes it much more likely that when we're in stressful or super-exciting situations, we'll be able to take that important pause that gives us time to make a responsible choice that we're proud of.



MAIN POINTS: Reflect on what matters most for our learning;
Introduce "spotlight" reinforcement (15 min)

- Provide a personal example of what you value in a learning environment when you are trying to learn something new (such as having a quiet atmosphere, working with a partner, or being able to ask questions).
- Ask students to think about what works best for them when they're trying to learn in class.
- Record the ideas in web format on the board or chart paper.



GUIDING LANGUAGE

Let's begin by making a brainstorm web about what really helps us learn and feel comfortable in our classroom. We'll write our topic in the center: "What Matters Most for our Learning." Share your personal example of something that actually matters to you about the classroom environment, such as being able to concentrate, getting help when needed, remembering that mistakes are a natural part of learning, or kindness.


We'll take a few minutes to think quietly to ourselves about what really matters about our classroom when we're all trying to learn. What helps you feel comfortable and ready to learn in our classroom? For some of us, it's very helpful when it's quiet during work time, or that the work is fun or challenging—or both! For others, it's especially important to have time to talk about what we're working on, and to feel good about asking questions to be sure we understand. Think about what's helpful to you as a learner. Pause. Also, think about what matters to you about how we treat each other. Pause.

Remember that everyone learns in different ways, so as you think about what you need to be able to learn best, please also get ready to listen carefully, to better understand what is helpful to others. Pause. Turn to a neighbor and take about a minute each to share your ideas about what matters most to you, for your own best learning. Pause.

Next we'll put our ideas down on our class web.



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 *When a classmate says something that you thought of too, please raise your hand so we can see that it is also important to you. Remember that we want our classroom to work for every single person here, so all of us want to try to understand what works well for others, even when it's different from our ideas.*

Record student responses on a web on the board or poster paper, or directly onto the 'spotlight' paper circles. Some items may not fit readily with your current classroom rules (such as chewing gum or playing music). These can be listed off to the side under the title "Consider" to be considered at a future time.

It's very important that everyone's ideas are included, even if only one or two people name a particular idea. It really matters that everyone's ideas are on our web, and that you feel confident that what works for you to learn best is part of our agreement.

We'll be hanging up our web and referring to it throughout our work times, and at the end of the day we'll "spotlight" positive examples of when we helped each other create a caring, effective place for everyone to learn.



MAIN POINTS: Reinforce Pause Power (10 minutes)

- Let students know how you will be using their ideas, and will be pausing to help them notice and reinforce the related choices they're making throughout your school day.
- Reinforce the concept of Pause Power, which encourages taking occasional pauses to notice and realign as needed with what matters most to the group's learning.



GUIDING LANGUAGE

Building a Pause Power strategy actually allows our brains time to make a choice. So if learning to do new things really matters for me, then when I'm doing my schoolwork, I'll use my Pause Power to notice how things are going and to make sure I'm acting in ways that I said matter most: that I'm really understanding and learning.

And, if I'm playing math games and I'm tempted to not pay attention to the skill we're practicing, I use my Pause Power to notice that—and re-focus so that I can learn the new idea that will help me get better at math.

Every day, we'll take time as a group to pause for a moment at different times, to stop and consider what we're doing, and quickly redirect ourselves if we need to.

It's also helpful for us to notice our successes—how we're helping each other build an effective learning environment. So, we'll also make time every day to spotlight examples of when we put our values into action. For example, "Quentin was helpful to me when I didn't understand what I was doing," or, "I got so much done during Writing when we had our quiet time."



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REFLECTION AND CLOSURE (2 minutes)

Let's end with three spotlight comments right now on what's working well. Pause for a moment and think about ways you or others in our group are making good decisions to support everyone's learning today. Pause. Of course, we'll make mistakes from time to time, too, but let's use our spotlight sessions to notice what's working well so we can build on that. Your comment can be general for our whole group or about a person. Here are some examples:

"When people were giving their ideas for the web, no one said any putdowns or made fun of them."

"Matrona asked a question that helped me understand what we were doing."

"People were quiet when others were answering, so I could hear what was going on."

Solicit student input and record and/or acknowledge their responses.

We'll hang these helpful ideas around the room, and as we work on learning effectively together, we will remember to stop (Pause) and use our Pause Power to think about whether we're making responsible decisions for our very best learning. Practice makes permanent!



EXTENSION STRATEGIES

Reinforce this concept and build student capacity by regularly making a point of pausing, noticing, and naming successful contributions. Doing this at least twice a day to begin with will help solidify the practice for the students and for you!

Once students are confident with this group process, ask them during or at the end of work sessions to individually self-reflect on their success at demonstrating particular spotlighted learning strategies. Continue this practice regularly, brainstorming additional strategies as needed to keep the activity fresh and effective.

EXTENSION LESSON: "Personalized What Matters Most"



MAIN POINTS: Create individual or small group student web and poster (20 minutes)

- Refresh for students the class lesson you did on "What Matters Most" and their classroom learning.
- Have students make their own brainstorm chart of things that matter to them personally, and then share one idea during a deconstructed "what matters most" conversation. Adults may wish to support capturing the "WMM" conversation by taking notes to leave with student, or encouraging students to write on their own papers during this 1:1 discussion.



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GUIDING LANGUAGE

Recently we learned about Pause Power and worked together to create our list of what matters most to us, as a class, to help everyone learn the best we can. Now it's your turn to think more about this for yourself! You will have time now to make a web or list of things that really matter to you, things that are important to you in your life. Show or describe a personal example.

We'll start with quiet private thinking time, and then when the music stops, you can talk with others near you while you keep working, sharing your lists, and helping each other think this through.

ADAPTATION

Primary students, or students of any age who need additional support, can bring their lists or webs to a small group, working with an adult to help guide the “getting to the heart of it” discussion.

MAIN POINT: Sharing ideas (5 minutes)

Share ideas as a small group or in partners, giving each student a chance to explain “what matters most” to them about the topic they chose today.

Students share the idea they care about and what really matters most to them about that.

GUIDING LANGUAGE

You've been very thoughtful today, thinking hard about what matters to you—and how you can be strong and make responsible decisions that will help you act in ways that always keep you in line with what you value most.

We're going to go around the circle (or share with a partner or in a trio) and share our thinking. For example, today I would say that what matters most to me about being outside is feeling calm and happy. So when I'm taking a walk outside, I pause to notice how I'm feeling. If my head is all busy with worries or grumpy thinking, I use my Pause Power to remember that I can make a different choice. I can take some deep breaths, and look around at the beautiful day, and calm myself so that I can enjoy the rest of my walk.

If you're choosing to pass, please do that out loud by saying “pass,” and I'll check in with you later.

Have students share today's idea they care about and what really matters most to them about that idea.



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CLOSURE (3 minutes)



MAIN POINTS: Encourage positive feedback and support

- Encourage the participants to provide positive feedback to their peers.
- Provide an opportunity for participants to be supportive of one another.



GUIDING LANGUAGE

Please look around our circle and give a nod, a smile, or a thumbs-up to other people, showing that we are all in this together and that we're going to help each other make decisions that let everyone get what really matters most to them, so we can all learn.



EXTENSION

Participants benefit from engaging in this activity multiple times. If your group has SEL folders in which they keep work connected to these lessons, they could revisit their original list to choose an idea, or add others, when the activity is repeated. The important thing is that they get to the heart of (or break it down to) a core idea that will be easy to remember and commit themselves to when they're using Pause Power to stop, think, and make an intentional decision that is in line with what they really care about.



DECISION MAKING

Teacher: Self-Management Goals

Decision Making: A child's approach to problem solving that involves learning from others and from their own previous experiences, using their values to guide their action, and accepting responsibility for their decisions.

My students are able to:

- Recognize feelings that distract them from being ready to learn
- Name strategies for settling themselves
- Use strategies for settling themselves

I am aware of my individual students' abilities to:

- Name and describe feelings that distract them from learning
- Name and use proactive strategies for settling themselves

The environment I create supports my students' growth related to:

- Supporting self and others in recognizing when they are distracted
- Supporting self and others in actively shifting from distracted to settled and ready to learn

Student: Self-Management goals and demonstrated behaviors

Students will:

- Notice and name distracting feelings that interfere with being ready to learn
- Name strategies for settling themselves
- Use strategies for settling themselves

DESSA SELF-MANAGEMENT INDICATORS (Highlighted indicators are directly addressed in this lesson.)

I can:

Follow the example of a positive role model
Accept responsibility for what I did
Show good judgment
Seek advice
Learn from experience
Follow the advice of a trusted adult
Show the ability to decide between right and wrong
Use available resources (people or objects) to solve a problem