



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 many 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 think about how you make important decisions that are in line with what matters most to you, and that support learning – which is everyone’s number-one job at school. When we take time to reflect on what works best for us in our classroom, what we value the most, then we can strive to make decisions to support that every day. We’ll begin by making a brainstorm web about what we value in our classroom environment.

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.



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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 an intentional pause between our feelings and thoughts, and the decision to take action on them, helps build that pause 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 minutes)

- 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 are trying to learn in class.
- Record the ideas in web format on the board or chart paper.



GUIDING LANGUAGE

We'll begin by making a brainstorm web about what most contributes to being ready to learn and feeling comfortable in our classroom. Our topic in the center is: “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 learn and feel comfortable 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 through what we're working on, and to ask questions without being embarrassed. Think about what's helpful to you as a learner. Pause. Also, think about what matters to you in terms of how we treat each other. Pause.

Remember that we each have our own experience of the classroom, so while you're thinking about what you need to support your best learning, please also get ready to listen carefully, to better understand what is helpful to others.

You'll have about four minutes to make your own web or list. Please think about specific examples of what's helpful when you are learning something and also about how you would like to be treated in our class. Pause for about 3 minutes, circulating to support students as needed.

As you finish with your list or web, please read back over it, and put a star or checkmark next to the three items that are most important you. Pause another minute or so.

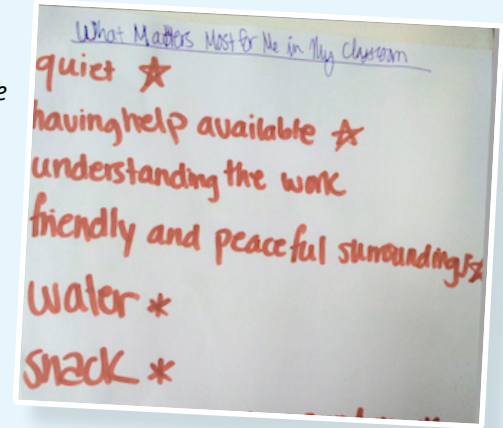


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Now we'll put our ideas down on a class web. Look over your list and make sure you've marked the top three things that matter most to you.

When a classmate contributes something that is also on your list, please raise your hand so we can see that it is also important to you. Remember, too, that we want our classroom to work for every single person here, so we will each want to try to understand and consider what works well for others, even when it's different from our list.

Record student responses in a web on the board or chart paper, or record each idea on a large yellow circle that can be displayed. 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.



Is there anyone whose top three are not up on the web yet? We know that it's vital that everyone's ideas are included. Even if only one or two people name a particular idea, others may well have thought about it too. It really matters that everyone feels well represented on our web—and feels confident that what works for you to learn best is present in our agreement.

Once our class brainstorm web is complete, we'll post it in the classroom and refer back during class, and at the end of the day (or session) to "spotlight" positive examples of when we helped each other create a caring, effective work environment.



MAIN POINTS: Reinforce Pause Power (10 minutes)

- Let students know how you'll be using their ideas, and will be pausing to reinforce the choices they're making each day related to the group's learning. Encourage them to use this strategy on an individual basis when it is personally beneficial.
- 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.



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

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

It's also helpful for us to notice when we see evidence of our successes—how we're helping one another build an effective learning environment, so we'll take a few moments at the end of the day (or class) to spotlight examples of when we put our values into action, such as "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."

We'll post our web on the wall (or copy items onto your large yellow "spotlight" circles) so we can spotlight examples at the end of class sessions. Please make a point of pausing regularly and noticing when you are making decisions that are working well for the group, and what contributes to that. We'll take time to hear examples at the end of the session. Of course, we'll make mistakes from time to time, too, but let's use our spotlight sharing to notice what is working well so we can build on those strengths.

REFLECTION AND CLOSURE (2 minutes)

Let's end with three spotlight comments right now about what's working well. Pause for a moment and think about ways you or others in our group are making effective decisions to support everyone's learning. Pause. Your comment can be general for the group or specific to 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."

"Martin 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 acknowledge their responses with a nod or 'thank you for sharing.'

We'll hang these helpful ideas around the room, and as we work on learning effectively together, we will be able to stop, (Pause) use our Pause Power, and reflect and self-assess on how we're supporting each other, and ourselves, in making responsible decisions for our very best learning.



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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.

When your students are comfortable expressing themselves about the contributions and effects their learning decisions are having on the group, give individual or group attention toward using this same strategy in their personal lives.

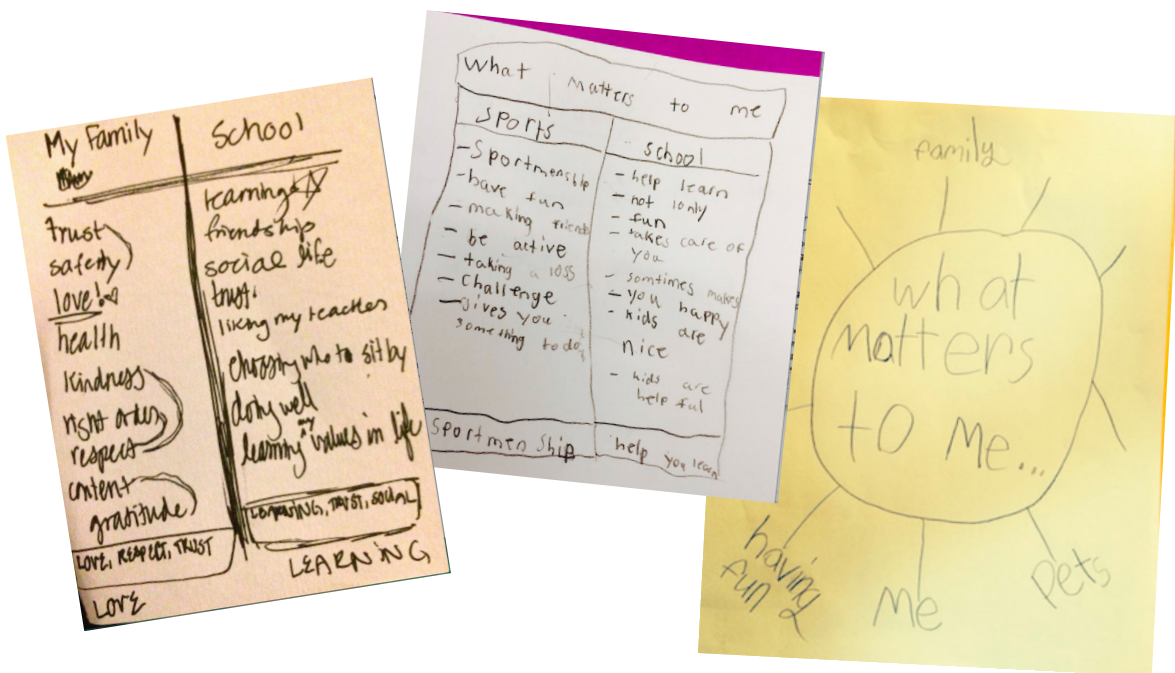
EXTENSION LESSON: "Personalized What Matters Most"



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 choose one to get to the heart of on a poster or a web.





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GUIDING LANGUAGE

Recently we learned about Pause Power and we 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 list of things that really matter to you, things that are important to you in your life. Show or create an 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.

When you're ready, choose one item from your web and make a poster that shows all of the things that really matter to you about that activity or group, and at the bottom, choose one, like on our examples, that shows what really matters most to you. This strategy helps each of us to 'keep our eye on the ball' so are less likely to get distracted from our main goals, and helps us continually make the small, important decisions that keep us on track toward what truly matters most.

ADAPTATION

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. Adults may wish to support capturing the conversation by taking notes to leave with student, or encouraging students to write ideas on their own papers during the discussion.

MAIN POINT: Sharing ideas (5 minutes)

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

GUIDING LANGUAGE

You've been very thoughtful today, really considering deeply 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 your core values.

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 filled with worries or crabbiness, I use my Pause Power to remember that I can make a different choice. I can take some deep breaths, and look around me at the beautiful day, and calm myself so that I can enjoy the rest of my walk.



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

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, signifying that we are all in this together and that we're going to help each other make decisions that help everyone get what really matters most to them, so we can all learn.

ADAPTATION

Depending on your group size and makeup, you may wish to have each participant do this closure strategy individually, so that everyone knows who to look at. Choose someone to begin or take a volunteer, and have them quickly and silently make eye contact with a nod, smile, or thumbs-up with each group member. Repeat, taking turns around the circle. This is a higher-risk action, because participants may feel put on the spot or embarrassed, especially at first. When you are beginning to use this closure strategy, it's fine to give the direction to the group in general and not to monitor whether everyone's made a non-verbal connection with each person, while the trust level is being built. Once students become confident with the routine, this is a powerful team building experience.



EXTENSION

Participants benefit from engaging in this activity multiple times. If your group has specific folders in which they keep work connected to these SEL 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