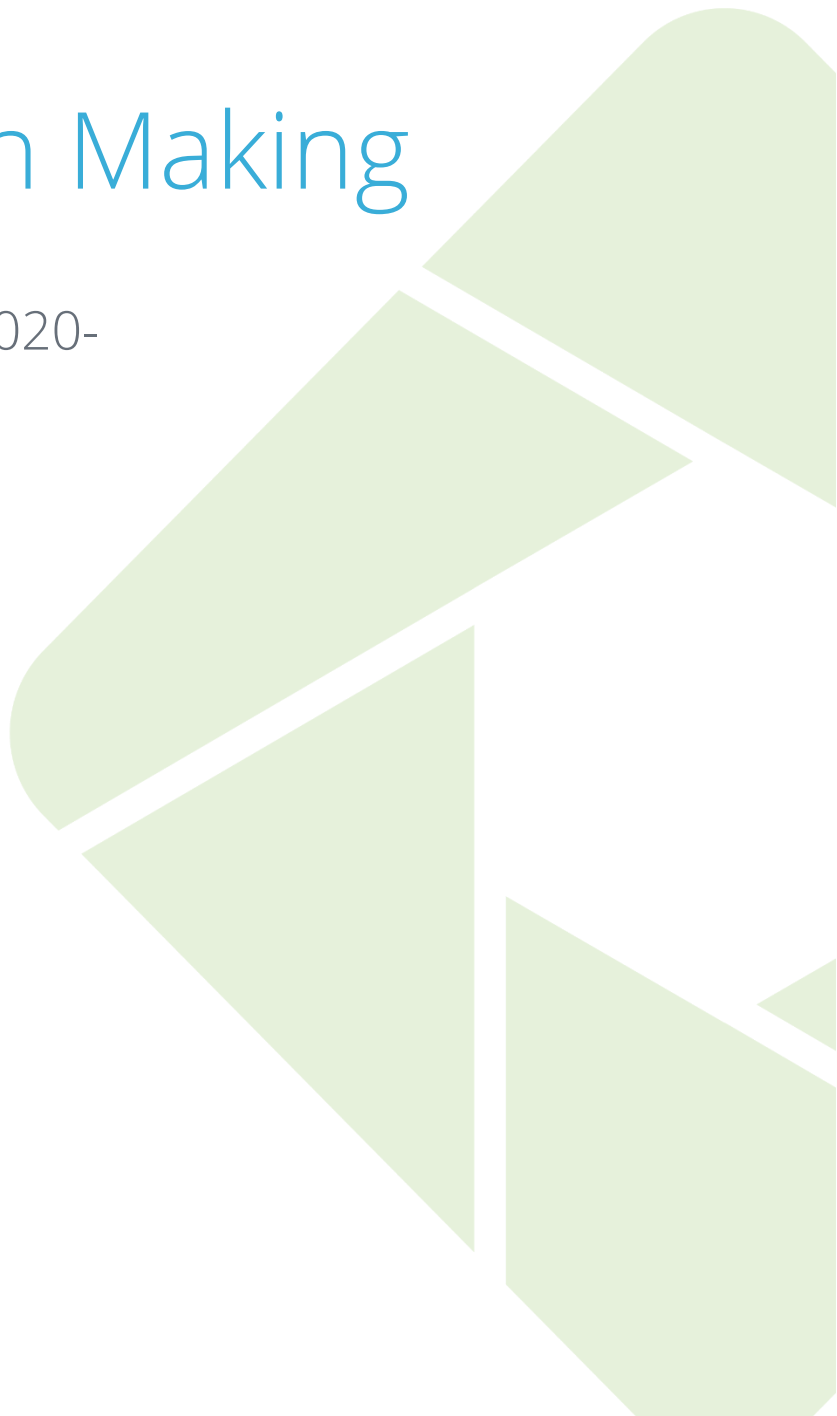# DESSA
Comprehensive SEL System

APERTURE EDUCATION

STRATEGIES GUIDE:

Decision Making

-2020-

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.

What is Decision Making?

Decision Making is "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." Children who are skilled at Decision Making may appear confident, flexible, responsible, and creative. They can pause, even when emotions are high, and think about a variety of actions before selecting one as a response to a situation or problem. They will exercise good judgment in selecting solutions to problems and in evaluating decisions that they have put into action. For example, a student competent in Decision Making, whose friend talks to her while the teacher is speaking to the class, is able to consider multiple possible reactions (e.g., talking to her friend, shushing her friend, whispering a response, passing a note, or ignoring the friend and paying attention to the teacher). The student exercising skillful decision-making will demonstrate positive values in selecting a response (perhaps remaining focused on the teacher's words) and will later think about the outcome of the decision in order to learn from it.

Approaches to problem solving are often defined using a framework or model (Elias, 1997; D'Zurilla, Nezu & Maydeu-Olivares, 2004). These models typically involve a defined series of steps that are consistently followed to help individuals make more intentional, better-informed, and more consistent decisions. There are a variety of problem-solving frameworks. Most such frameworks include identifying a problem or situation, pausing to generate possible responses or solutions, considering these possibilities, selecting one, and evaluating the decision after it has been made (Urbain & Kendall, 1980; D'Zurilla, Nezu & Maydeu-Olivares, 2004; Elias, 1997). The DESSA items that comprise the Decision Making scale represent skills that contribute to effectively utilizing a problem solving framework or model. Therefore, literature about problem solving is drawn upon for understanding the development and benefits of Decision Making skills.

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Other terms may capture concepts similar, but not identical to, Decision Making as defined in the DESSA. In addition to problem solving, other resources might mention executive functioning, self-control, or healthy habits. These terms may refer to aspects of Decision Making or to competencies that require some of the same skills that a child must apply to make positive decisions. However, they should not be taken as synonymous with the Decision Making scale on the DESSA.

Decision Making may seem to overlap with other social-emotional constructs such as Goal-Directed Behavior, Self-Management, and Personal Responsibility. In fact, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) does not separate Decision Making from Personal Responsibility, but rather articulates a combined construct called "Responsible Decision Making," which is defined as "the ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others" (CASEL, 2012). The authors of the DESSA have separated Decision Making from Personal Responsibility in an effort to simplify these concepts, so that adults can more easily identify and develop these competencies in children and youth. Decision Making focuses on the skills needed to effectively problem solve and make positive choices, whereas the items of the Personal Responsibility construct indicate careful and reliable behavior and contributions to group efforts.

The DESSA for grades kindergarten through 8 (DESSA K-8) and DESSA-High School Edition for grades 9-12 (DESSA-HSE) measure Decision Making with the following items.

DESSA K-8	DESSA-HSE
37. follow the example of a positive role model	22. follow the example of a positive role model?
39. accept responsibility for what she/he did	25. show good judgment?
42. show good judgment	37. learn from experience?
52. seek advice	38. follow the advice of a trusted adult?
65. learn from experience	40. do the right thing in a difficult situation?
66. follow the advice of a trusted adult	
68. show the ability to decide between right and wrong	
69. use available resources (people or objects) to solve a problem	

Although all the items on the Decision Making scale refer to behaviors important for effective problem solving, we've identified three different aspects of the construct. Items 37, 52, 66, and 69 (DESSA K-8) and items 22 and 38 (DESSA-HSE) specifically indicate behaviors related to *learning from*

others. Items 42 and 68 (DESSA K-8) and items 25 and 40 (DESSA-HSE) indicate *using values to guide actions and behaviors*. Lastly, items 39 and 65 (DESSA K-8) and item 37 (DESSA-HSE) indicate *accepting responsibility for decisions made in order to learn from previous experiences*. Each of these aspects represents important skills for making positive decisions, not only as children, but throughout life.

The Different Aspects of Decision Making

Decision Making, like all of the social-emotional competencies measured by the DESSA, involves multiple skills. It is described as a child's "approach to problem-solving," but extends beyond the use of a step-by-step framework for making decisions, or solving problems, by underscoring skills that support children in *most effectively using* any such framework. Developing the skills to do things such as seek advice, show good judgment, and learn from experience, can help children enhance their use of a problem-solving approach, enabling them to reach more positive outcomes through this type of process, and learn from the results of decisions made by themselves and others.

As you encounter the Decision Making strategies within this resource, you might notice that they focus on one or more aspects of behavior that contribute to Decision Making: 1) learning from others, 2) using values to guide actions and behaviors, and 3) accepting responsibility for decisions in order to learn from previous experiences.

LEARNING FROM OTHERS

One important aspect contributing to positive Decision Making is *learning from others*. For example, effective Decision Making may involve following the example of a positive role model, seeking advice, following the advice of a trusted adult, and/or using available people to solve a problem. Learning from others comes naturally for children, who learn many skills including social-emotional skills through modeling - observing and replicating the actions of people in their world (Bandura, 1971; Payton et al., 2009; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003; Ocak, 2010; Urbain & Kendall, 1980). Adults serve as fundamental role models for children learning to make positive decisions and can support children in this learning by "thinking out loud" while navigating their own decision-making process (Elias, 1997). However, more active support for children's decision-making can be provided through direct guidance and teaching children active strategies for gathering knowledge and help from others for making positive and healthy decisions (Elias, 1997).

As children grow older, they place increasing value on their peer relationships (Eccles, 1999; Elias, 1997). Therefore, peers can become very influential in the decision-making process. Despite this transition, it is important that adults, both in and out of the home, do not underestimate their influence on the children and youth in their lives (Eccles, 1999; Dahl, 2004; Elias, 1997). Adolescents may be less likely to acknowledge the influence of caring adults on their lives and decisions, but this support can be crucial in keeping youth safe and healthy through this developmental period when risk-taking and sensation seeking becomes more common (Elias, 1997; Dahl, 2004).

USING VALUES TO GUIDE ACTIONS AND BEHAVIORS

Beyond the lessons learned from observing and interacting with others, children benefit from *using values to guide their actions and behaviors.* However, children must first *develop* values in order to call upon them to guide their conduct. From early in life, adults set the tone for what behaviors and actions are valued and prioritized in a child's home and community (Weissbourd, Jones, Anderson, Kahn, & Russell, 2014). A child's peers and media such as television and the internet also exert strong influences on children's understanding of behavioral expectations and may challenge the values adults hope to instill (Eccles, 1999; Dahl, 2004).

Adults are encouraged to provide children with tools to make independent, healthy decisions through openly discussing their ideas about morals, ethics, priorities, spirituality, the common good, and what is right and wrong (Weissbourd et al., 2014). It is helpful for adults to introduce these ideas to assist children and youth in developing and exploring positive values; however, adults should avoid trying to impose agendas and values on youth - which can obstruct open dialog, and discourage development of autonomy and personal identity (Kress, 2006). Children who have had opportunities to discuss and develop positive values are more likely to demonstrate good judgment and the ability to decide between right and wrong when faced with a decision or problem. For example, these children may be able to consider the impact of their decisions on themselves and others and consider the needs of others when making a decision.

ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY FOR DECISIONS TO LEARN FROM PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES

To build a Decision Making repertoire, children must learn to *accept responsibility for their decisions and learn from previous experiences.* Experiencing the consequences of decisions, whether

negative or positive, helps children recognize the significance of their choices, and the effects that their decisions can have on themselves and others. Consequences can serve to reinforce positive decisions or discourage children from making negative, or unhealthy, decisions in the future (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). However, it is important to keep in mind that the outcomes of some unhealthy decisions may not affect the child or youth immediately and may even be overshadowed by short term positive sensations or pleasure (Dahl, 2004). Accordingly, some research suggests that many children in the U.S. have trouble making decisions that require them to sacrifice short-term pleasure for long-term gain (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). This makes the role of adults in the lives of children and youth even more important for reinforcing positive decisions and for providing guidance and modeling in the face of the competing messages that children encounter (Elias, 1997).

The Development and Importance of Decision Making

Decision Making permeates everyone's daily behaviors and social interactions (Elias, 1997). Because Decision Making is a daily experience for everyone, it is a skill that is necessary to develop and hone early in life (Elias & Kress, 1994; Elias, 1997; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003). Individuals must constantly make decisions about things such as how we want to spend our time and with whom, how we will react to situations and the actions of others, and whose example we want to follow. These decisions, large and small, have consequences and outcomes which may have a range of effects on the lives of the decision-makers and those around them. Ultimately, the types of decisions an individual makes influence the physical and emotional safety and health of oneself and others. Therefore, competent Decision Making skills enable adults to trust children and give them increased responsibility and autonomy as they move toward independence (Elias, 1997; Eccles, 1999).

DEVELOPING DECISION MAKING IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Children learn Decision Making skills first through modeling - observing the people in their world and following the examples they see (Bandura, 1971; Payton et al., 2009; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003; Ocak, 2010). Children and youth continually witness adults and peers making decisions and leading their lives as a result of those decisions. You have likely heard the expression "actions speak louder than words." Every decision made by an adult, whether spoken or observed in action, how it's implemented, and how adults openly evaluate it, makes a clear and lasting statement to

children. Adults' decisions about how to behave, interact with others, present ideas, teach lessons, and provide effective opportunities for joyful, engaging learning, all set examples long remembered by children and youth.

Beyond observing others, children learn from talking with, and listening to, people they admire and respect (Elias & Kress, 1994; Elias, 1997; Ocak, 2010). Therefore, if adults make time for conversations with children and youth about their beliefs, values, and personal processes for generating solutions to problems and making decisions, it will pay big dividends over time (Elias, 1997). Keep in mind, however, that children are acutely aware of any discrepancies between our expressed beliefs and our actions (Weissbourd et al., 2014). This suggests the importance of adhering to the rules, values, and beliefs we lay out; and of being willing to openly re-evaluate these items if they are called into question and are no longer serving their intended purpose (Weissbourd et al., 2014). Adults can openly share reflections before and after making decisions by literally "thinking out loud" when children and youth are present. This allows for transparency but also provides intentional modeling of Decision Making skills.

It can be very beneficial for adults to teach children a step-by-step process for approaching problems or situations and making resultant decisions (Elias, 1997; Elias & Kress, 1994; Nezu & D'Zurilla, 1979). Teaching this type of framework serves to create a common language and clear expectations which can be reinforced over time (Elias, 1997; Bradshaw, Mitchell & Leaf, 2010). Some children are easily able to execute a step-by-step process of Decision Making because of their heightened awareness of the modeling of this process by individuals in their lives, or because they lean more naturally to organized, logical thought progressions. On the other hand, some children require more explicit instructional time and practice to be able to apply this type of approach (Elias, 1997). No matter whether a child falls within or between these two categories, research shows that all students can benefit from learning a decision-making framework (Nezu & D'Zurilla, 1979; Elias, 1997). A typical framework for Decision Making or problem solving is described below.

The first step in an effective decision-making process is to pause to identify the problem and analyze the situation (Elias, 1997; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003; D'Zurilla, Nezu & Maydeu-Olivares, 2004). This moment can serve as a cue for children to begin a step-by-step decision-making process. Children must initially be able to identify the problem or situation they face and appraise it as a challenge rather than a threat. Therefore, it is important to cultivate children's confidence in the face

of uncertain situations and to teach children to "talk back" to negative feelings such as self-doubt, fear, and frustration (D'Zurilla, Nezu & Maydeu-Olivares, 2004).

Sometimes successful Decision Making takes time and patience – a point that may be a helpful reminder to children and the adults who support them (D'Zurilla, Nezu & Maydeu-Olivares, 2004). Encouraging children to take the time to stop and think allows children a moment to calm themselves down in order to process information and feelings in the face of a challenge. It also makes it less likely a young person will make rash decisions and act impulsively or carelessly (Elias, 1997; D'Zurilla, Nezu & Maydeu-Olivares, 2004; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003). The DESSA Strategies refer to this moment in the decision-making process as "Pause Power." For adults and students alike, building a habit of pausing, evaluating options, and making decisions calmly and intentionally is crucial.

The second step in the decision-making process is to generate possible responses, or alternatives, to solve a problem or react to a situation (Elias, 1997; D'Zurilla, Nezu & Maydeu-Olivares, 2004; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003; Urbain & Kendall, 1980). This step may involve brainstorming - a method for generating alternatives without judging them during the 'brainstorm.' The more potential solutions a child can identify, the more options he or she will have to evaluate and choose from. This is not a step that a child needs to complete in isolation. It is often helpful to have multiple sources of input involved in the brainstorming process—a child may seek help from role models, peers or older children (Elias & Kress, 1994; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003). Teaching the child to seek out advice and draw on the experiences of others, particularly when they have little knowledge or experience with a situation, will increase his or her ability to independently generate alternatives and consider the perspectives of others in future Decision Making scenarios. It can also support the development of his or her personal values as the input of others is considered and contemplated (Miller & Byrnes, 2001; Elias 1997; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003).

In step three, the child evaluates the ideas that he or she has generated. In this step the child must weigh the potential consequences of each idea, as well as the values and desires of self and others, in order to ultimately choose an action in response to a problem or situation (D'Zurilla, Nezu & Maydeu-Olivares, 2004). Effective Decision Making typically involves selecting an action that adheres to personal values, while maximizing positive consequences, and minimizing distress and negative consequences, for all involved (D'Zurilla, Nezu & Maydeu-Olivares, 2004). The values discussed, shared, and modeled throughout a child's life will help him or her determine which actions

most align with his or her personal values. Nonetheless, to make effective decisions children may also need to consider the perspectives of others, and cooperate, compromise, or negotiate with other children or adults (D'Zurilla, Nezu & Maydeu-Olivares, 2004; Elias, 1997; Shure, 1999). Open dialogue with adults can develop children's ability to understand and reflect upon the feelings and perspectives of others when making decisions. However, adults can also prompt these considerations and provide direct guidance in the moment, if children need support to make a decision that is both personally meaningful and respectful of the interests of others (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003; Elias, 1997; Shure, 1999; Kress, 2006).

When evaluating ideas and selecting actions, a child may draw upon experiences of past decisions and the consequences that followed. These may be decisions the child made him or herself, or decisions made by others that the child observed. With this in mind, we must allow children to safely experience the consequences of their decisions so they can effectively reflect upon and evaluate their choices (Costello, Wachtel & Wachtel, 2009). Consequences can serve to reinforce positive decisions or discourage the child from making decisions with negative outcomes in the future. For the child this goes hand-in-hand with accepting responsibility for a decision made. The child must take ownership of his or her decisions in order to recognize the relationship of his or her actions to the consequences that ensue. Through trial and error children and youth can adapt and improve their Decision Making based on the consequences – positive or negative– experienced.

However, in certain situations a child may need to predict consequences that they have never experienced or observed in order to make an effective decision. Coaching a child to engage in "if, then" thinking, sometimes referred to as "consequential thinking" when decision points arise, (e.g., If I do this then what might be the outcome?) can foster this ability (Shure, 1998; Shure, 2014; Urbain & Kendall, 1980). Furthermore, adults can create teachable moments during naturally occurring decision points by helping children see the specific path or link leading from a decision to its result - either positive or less positive (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003; Shure, 1998; Shure, 2014).

While Decision Making often comes with natural consequences, adults can also provide consequences to influence the likelihood that a child will repeat a behavior. Adults can and should provide consequences for a child's positive decisions in addition to negative or undesired decisions (Applestein, 1998). Genuine reinforcement, such as specific praise and recognition following positive decisions can be very effective and meaningful (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003). If reinforcement and feedback are provided in non-judgmental ways that help children feel

supported, they will feel a connection to the source of reinforcement (adults, peers, people at school, out-of-school time program staff). This increases the chance that a child will further "buy-in" to behavioral expectations set forth and will make ongoing efforts to internalize skills and values that will lead to long-term improvements in Decision Making habits (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996).

It is important for adults supporting children and youth to recognize that learning to make healthy decisions can be challenging and involves more than memorizing and applying a framework like the one described above. Effective Decision Making skills develop over years of practice and support. Practice helps children gain the experience and perspective needed to consistently use positive decision-making skills even when excited or upset (Elias & Kress, 1994; Dahl, 2004; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003). This means that children must be given many opportunities for making meaningful decisions, in a variety of settings, independently, and with others. Developmentally appropriate Decision Making opportunities that balance challenge with high opportunities for success must be offered by supportive adults, keeping in mind that individual children grow and develop at different rates (Dahl, 2004; Eccles, 1999; Kress, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003).

Adults can provide opportunities for children to practice Decision Making starting at an early age through both formal and informal approaches. These may include role plays, fantasy play, games, written tasks, as well as pointing out Decision Making opportunities that occur naturally, allowing children to apply their skills (Urbain & Kendall, 1980; Elias and Kress, 1994; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003; Shure, 1998). If children are exposed to healthy decision-making opportunities early in life, they will have more chances to practice. It can be helpful to start with offering children opportunities to make small decisions (Dahl 2004; "Would you like to wear your green sweater or your yellow one?") and build up to larger, more important decisions ("I want you to get your homework done, but you can decide how to manage your time after school"). Certain methods for teaching Decision Making are particularly effective for young children, such as modeling with puppets and videos, games, and guided role plays with peers (Elias, 1997; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003).

The Benefits of Decision Making

Decision Making, like all social-emotional competencies, is necessary for success in all areas of children's lives. With this in mind, the DESSA Growth Strategies were written to include activities for developing children's social and emotional skills in the home, at school, and in the out-of-school time

program. The benefits of effective Decision Making can be observed across these environments and contributes to student success at present and in the future.

IN THE HOME

Children who are skilled at Decision Making will likely be engaged in learning at home, exercising good judgment, and contributing to a more peaceful home climate. Their positive attitudes and confidence (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003; Elias and Kress, 1994) and tendency to seek out advice may enhance their ability to develop relationships with caregivers and siblings.   Furthermore, these children may be less likely to engage in aggressive acts or exhibit behavioral problems, such as fighting with siblings or parents (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003; Urbain & Kendal, 1980). This investment of time and attention pays off for the adults as well and in turn, allows parents the freedom to spend less time disciplining.

As children move toward independence, competent decision-making enables caregivers at home to trust them and give them increased opportunities to make their own decisions at home (Elias, 1997). When children have demonstrated effective approaches to problem solving, parents' related stress levels may go down, and children are more likely to be trusted at home to make good choices because adults know that they typically show good judgment (Nezu & D'Zurilla, 1979). When families offer opportunities for personal autonomy and encourage an adolescent's role in family Decision Making, children often show positive outcomes such as increased self-esteem, self-reliance, and advanced moral reasoning (Eccles, 1999). These children may even become more media literate – able to question values, issues, and stories shared through various forms of media, and consider alternate perspectives (Elias, 1997). Lastly, it is important to note that effective approaches to problem solving can support children in coping with emotional situations at home such as divorce or bereavement (Elias, 1997).

In contrast, lack of, or poor, Decision Making skills may have the opposite effect at home – straining relationships with caregiving adults and siblings in the face of negative choices and resulting behaviors (Elias, 1997). Children may establish negative behavior patterns at home leading adults to expect these behaviors, a status quo which can take effort from both the child and the adults to dismantle (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003).

IN THE SCHOOL OR OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAM

Children who are effective decision makers contribute to peaceful, smoothly run classrooms and groups. Like at home, Decision Making skills affect both relationships and behaviors at school, and in out-of-school time programs. Decision Making skills improve children's ability to build and sustain relationships with peers and teachers through improved, more positive interactions (Ocak, 2010; Eccles, 1999; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003; Elias, 1997). Children who are skilled at Decision Making may be sought out by their peers for help with problems. Teachers may observe these children displaying more sensitivity to others' feelings and positive prosocial behaviors, compared to children who are less competent in this realm. Problem solving with others, a good Decision Making practice, provides opportunities to learn more about classmates or peers, promoting group cohesiveness (Elias, 1997). Problem solving skills can even help children who have experienced stress or risk factors cope with these events and lead them to show fewer behavior problems and better academic success than other children who have experienced risk (Dubow & Tisak, 1989).

It is important to keep in mind how directly a child's decision-making skills affect his or her learning in the classroom. Research has suggested that children at risk for academic failure and dropping out benefit from the influence of effective Decision Making on study skills. Decisions from whether to talk out of turn during class, to deciding to express confusion and ask clarifying questions, affect a child's ability to pay attention and focus in the classroom (Elias, 1997). Children who have problem solving skills often show fewer behavior problems, more positive behaviors and positive affect, and tend to be more involved with cooperative learning activities (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003; Urbain & Kendall, 1980; Elias & Kress 1994). Skilled Decision Makers may also have a better understanding of the consequences of their behavior, contributing to a better ability to cope with peer pressure (Elias & Kress, 1994). Consequently, teachers and out-of-school time professionals with students skilled at Decision Making will likely spend less time on behavior management, and increased time on academic content and planned activities.

In addition to increased instructional time, skills associated with Decision Making can influence a child's reputation with teachers and peers by preventing the development of negative behavioral patterns. This can improve a child's feelings of adjustment and belonging at school (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003; Eccles, 1999). Experiences and relationships in the school setting can also be improved simply by providing ample opportunities for children and youth to apply their

Decision Making skills. Opportunities to exercise growing independence and autonomy can encourage youth to engage in the classroom. Consequently, this can enhance overall relationships and experiences in the school setting (Eccles, 1999). Good problem-solvers may even better handle the difficult transition from elementary to middle school (Elias & Kress, 1994). In contrast, negative experiences in the school setting can influence whether children with conduct problems will continue to develop behavioral concerns and be perceived as difficult by the adults around them (Elias & Kress, 1994; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003).

IN THE FUTURE

Developing and practicing Decision Making in childhood can impact an individual's adult life. Every day, children are required to make important decisions that impact their future experiences. Decision Making prowess established in childhood influences future relationships, health, and career success. Children who learn the skills of Decision Making and apply them later in life are likely to have healthier, warmer relationships in adulthood, due to more use of cooperative and prosocial behaviors, and fewer actions that are harmful to relationships (Elias & Kress, 1994; Elias, 1997). Furthermore, cooperative problem-solving experiences throughout life may enhance these individuals' understanding and appreciation of alternate perspectives, and even lead to better functioning in diverse contexts and groups (Elias, 1997).

More directly, the ability to make effective decisions can influence both the physical and behavioral health of individuals into adulthood. Healthy Decision Making is necessary to prevent substance abuse, and may also mitigate the use of illegal drugs, cigarettes, and alcohol. Furthermore, Decision Making skills can play an important role in preventing risky sexual behaviors that may lead to unsafe situations and unplanned pregnancies in youth and later in life (Elias & Kress, 1994). Delinquent behaviors such as vandalism, and aggression against peers and parents may also be reduced through the application of effective problem-solving approaches. These types of behavior problems, as well as other mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety are often associated with deficiencies in problem solving skills (Elias & Kress, 1994; Elias, 1997).

Decision making skills are also important to career success. Acquiring a job often hinges on school success, which is highly influenced by the decisions a student makes. Furthermore, the skills for Decision Making are very relevant to success in the workplace. The Secretary's Commission on

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Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS, 1999) identify a number of characteristics outside of academic and technical knowledge and skills that are necessary for career readiness and employability. One of these skills is "Decision Making," and a number of additional skills mentioned fall into the realm of Decision Making as defined by the DESSA, including problem solving, knowing how to learn, acquiring and evaluating information, reasoning, creative thinking, and monitoring and correcting performance. Accordingly, good decision makers are likely to perform better in the workplace.

As can be seen, children who learn to leverage positive Decision Making skills early in life may avoid serious consequences resulting from poor interpersonal, health-related, or academic decisions (Elias & Kress, 1994). Decision Making and the social interactions involved in the decision-making process are vital to short-term and long-term success and happiness as a student, worker, family member, and/or citizen (Elias, 1997). Awareness and purpose will help adults create opportunities and take advantage of everyday interactions at home and school to teach, discuss, and reinforce appropriate decision making skills (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003). To be successful at this and have the greatest impact on the youth in their lives, adults may need to brush up on their own problem-solving skills (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2003). The strategies in this guide are merely a jumping off point. Human Rights Activist, Neil Postman (1994) once wrote, "Children are the living message we send to a time we will not see." With this in mind, adults must remember that the time we spend building social emotional skills like Decision Making will serve children for now and forever.

Decision Making Reflection Questions

We encourage you to explore this social-emotional competency in more depth by reflecting on the following questions:

- How do you see this competency providing opportunities for growth in your educational setting?
- What aspects of this competency would you like to learn more about?
- What do you see as the biggest challenges for building this competency in your students?

This guide does not represent a comprehensive literature review, but a foundation for exploring the strategies found in the DESSA Comprehensive SEL System. Please feel free to use the references below to further explore the construct of Decision Making.

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