

Chapter 26

Growing Up: Making Right Choices

Even if you are reading this chapter during your first class of the day you have already made about ten choices. What time did you wake up this morning? Did you turn on the radio? If so, what station did you listen to? Did you pick a CD to listen to? If so, which one? Did you decide to sleep for a few more minutes and skip breakfast?

If not, what did you have for breakfast? What did you decide to wear today? What did you say to the other people in your house this morning? Who did you sit with on the school bus, or who did you walk to school with? When you got to school did you go to your locker? Did you do your homework last night or perhaps study for a test? All of these actions required you to make a choice.

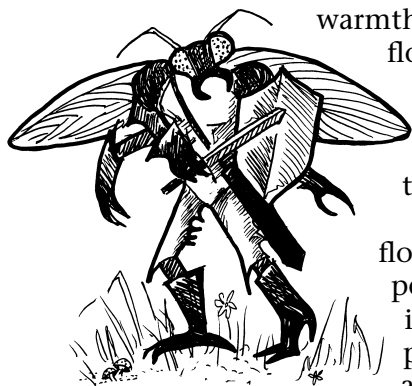
Life is full of choices. The choices listed above are not the most important ones that you make. But as small as some of those choices seem, how many of you were you able to make them when you were in diapers? Probably none of you. When you were in nursery school, you probably didn't decide whom you were friends with. Your parents may have picked out people for you to



play with. When you were six or seven, you probably didn't have to decide whether or not to study for a test. It is likely that you didn't decide what classes you would take either. Your parents or the school decided these things for you. But today you are making all kinds of important choices, choices you could not make when you were younger. As you grow up, you have the power to make more and more choices on your own. You have more control over your life than you may realize!

Only You Can Defend Yourself Against the Insects!

Imagine you were looking into a bag full of a hundred or more seeds. In the bag were the seeds for all kinds of beautiful flowers, plants, even vegetables. When you look at the seeds, you probably can't distinguish between a fennel seed and a caraway seed. If the seeds have good soil, sunshine, water and



warmth they will usually grow into beautiful flowers or plants. It is similar with people.

When you are born, it is difficult to see what kind of person you will become.

As you grow, your character and your talents begin to show more and more.

One difference between the way a flower or an animal grows and the way a person grows is that a person takes part in creating himself. Whereas it is already predetermined that a swallow will build a particular kind of nest and live on

worms, a person can choose how he will live. If a garden is full of insects, then the flowers are helpless. They can't defend themselves against the bugs. But if a person is faced with challenges, he can decide how he is going to respond. A person can decide whether to stand up and face challenges or to let the challenges eat away at him like the insects eat away at the flowers. Very few rose bushes or blue jays will think to themselves: *I don't like how I've been handling things lately, I think I'll take a new approach to my life.* Only you are capable of such thoughts and changes.

Where do Your Choices Take You?

You are the result of the choices you have made in the past. All people are. If you decided to eat two pounds of chocolate, three

bottles of whipped cream, a quart of ice cream and a jar of candied cherries every day for three months, then no doubt you would feel the result of having made that choice. Most likely you would feel bloated and unhealthy, it may be hard for you to concentrate, and you may not be able to move as quickly as you could before. Likewise, if your grades were in need of a little emergency assistance and you decided to start studying for several hours every night, surely you would see the results.

Isaac Newton, one of the greatest physicists ever, said that *for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction*. Every choice you make brings about some result, and each new choice leads to another choice. Learning to make right choices is a critical part of growing up. Your parents, guardians, aunts, uncles and teachers won't be with you at every turn to tell you what to do. You wouldn't want them to be! No one wants someone else making all their choices for them! So much is up to you now, and it's time to make some important choices soon. Let's talk about it!

You Decide What Kind of Person You Are

One of life's constant choices is this: deciding what kind of person you want to become. We say that it is a constant choice because you do not just make one statement that lasts your whole life. *I am going to be an amazing person; all the world will remember me when I am gone!* You may want to use your life to be an amazing person, but where do you start? Being amazing is a big job and can be done in a million different ways. You start by making choices. You create your character with every choice you make.

Here are some choices you may be faced with.

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| ☞ <i>Do what you say you will do</i> | <i>Break a commitment</i> |
| ☞ <i>Keep a secret</i> | <i>Tell a friend another friend's secret</i> |
| ☞ <i>Take a chance and try something new</i> | <i>Never try anything new (you're too afraid!)</i> |
| ☞ <i>Listen to your friend</i> | <i>Try to give your friend advice</i> |
| ☞ <i>Follow your inner voice</i> | <i>Forget your conscience</i> |
| ☞ <i>Study for a difficult class</i> | <i>Stay up late watching TV before a test</i> |
| ☞ <i>Control your temper</i> | <i>Scream at your friend when you're mad</i> |

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| ☞ Work towards your goals | Complain about the obstacles you face |
| ☞ Walk away from the gossip | Gossip about someone |
| ☞ Do your work ahead of time | Wait until the last second to do your work |

After looking at some of the choices above, it may be a little more clear how you form your own character by the decisions you make every day. Sometimes you will have to make huge decisions. But usually you are faced with smaller decisions that often contribute to the bigger picture—who you are!

Your Choices Show Your Values

Every day you choose how you are going to approach your day—in other words, you choose your attitude. *When you choose your attitude you also choose how you are going to treat other people.* By making these important decisions, you are showing what is important to you or what you value. If you value honesty, you are going to decide to tell your friend how you really feel, even though the alternative (pretending everything is fine) is certainly easier. If you value your commitments, then you are going to follow through, and do what you have said you would do.

How do you go about making decisions? If you don't decide what's important to you ahead of time it may be much more difficult to make a healthy choice on the spur of the moment. Understanding what is most important to you will help you to make tough choices.

Who's In Control?

For every choice you make there is an alternative, or another possible choice. A young man, John, who had just been found guilty of armed robbery said,

I didn't want to do the things I did, but I didn't have a good education, no money, and no connections. I had no choice.

John did have a choice. Because he didn't study, he did badly in school. He was also broke, but he had a choice. He could have worked, and eventually gained the experience he needed to have an interesting career. Maybe he could have gone to technical

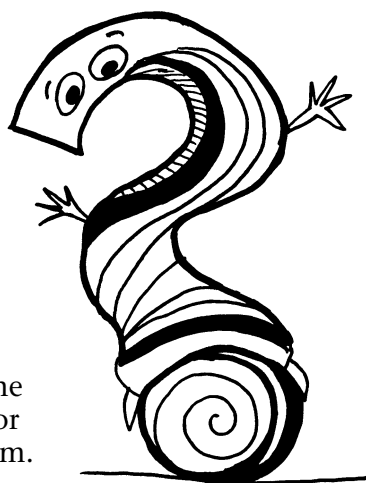
school, or night school. He did not have to commit a crime.

No one makes you do anything, unless you are being held hostage. When you are making a choice, you might want to ask yourself: *Who is in control?* If someone in school is teasing you and you react—who is in control? If you fail a test because you put off studying—who is in control?

Last year, Mrs. Kolomeisky had a class that tended to be overly energetic. Once she left a teaching aide in charge of the class for 10 minutes so she could run to the restroom. When she returned, the aide was upset.

When Mrs. Kolomeisky asked what the problem was, one student jumped out of his seat and said, “Mrs. Kolomeisky, she can’t control us!” Surprised at his statement, Mrs. Kolomeisky replied, “Why should she have to control you? Can’t you control yourselves?”

If someone picks at you and teases you, or tries to get you to fight, stop and think before you react. How do you want to respond? Will your response show that you are in control?



Big Decisions

Some decisions have more serious consequences than other decisions. Whether you decide to have chicken or fish for dinner on Saturday night will not affect you for weeks unless, of course, you get food poisoning. But if you decide to start smoking cigarettes, drinking, or smoking pot with your friends, your choice may affect you for a long time. Some choices don’t seem like a big deal but they lead to other choices, which lead to other choices, and so on.

Under pressure from friends, many people have decided to make wrong choices (*who is in control?*). Some of the biggest choices you will make have to do with your body. How are you going to treat yourself? Are you going to take substances that could hurt you? Are you going to wait until marriage for sex?

We wish that you were not faced with such decisions, but the fact is, sometimes you are. The choices you make now will carve out your future. If you start to smoke now you may become addicted and this may lead to serious health problems in the

future. If you decide to try out drugs and you get caught, you may have a hard time getting a job you want because you have a criminal record. If you decide to have sex with someone now, you may get a disease that will be with you for the rest of your life. So, when a big decision needs to be made, stop and think about it before you act. You have more control over your life than you think.

The Flip Side

As Isaac Newton said, there's *an equal and opposite reaction*. We'll call it the *flip side*. Let's say that you make right choices. You decide not to try smoking, drinking, or drugs, or you decide to wait for marriage before getting sexually involved. Every choice has a result, or a consequence. The result of making these good choices is that you will not have to worry about becoming addicted to a substance (and getting sick from using it), or risk getting a sexually transmitted disease from premarital sex. You also will not risk facing the emotional problems of making a bad choice—having your feelings hurt, feeling badly about yourself or fighting with your loved ones over your bad choice. When you have chosen not to go down the wrong road, you definitely reap the benefits of having made that choice.

One choice leads to another. By making right choices you may find opportunities you never dreamed could be possible before. What are some paths that right choices create?

How Do You Make a Decision?

Decisions, decisions, decisions! We have discussed every fine detail about the importance of decisions, but we haven't mentioned one little point—*How do you make a good choice?* There is no exact formula, but we have come up with some suggestions to help you.

Ask yourself:

What is the problem or the decision I have to make? Clearly define exactly what you have to decide.

Will the decision you are about to make help you to achieve a long-term goal? You are standing at a crossroads and you want to make the right choice. Which choice will help you to achieve your goals? Will your choice set you back and make it harder for you to reach your dream?

What are the alternatives? List all your options.

Who is involved? If someone else is involved how will my decision affect that person (or those people)? Would I want someone else to do to me what I will do to them?

What are the consequences of choosing one choice over the other?

There may be consequences in the immediate future and more consequences in the distant future—what are they?

If everyone made the decision that I am leaning toward, what would the world be like? If you are having a really hard time trying to make a decision, you might want to ask yourself if the world would be a better or worse place if everyone did as you might do.

The Case of Laura

Laura has been invited to a concert with her friend Ruth. However, she has already promised to spend that evening with her friend Helen for her birthday. Helen is counting on Laura, and it will be just the two of them going out. Laura would like to go to the concert. What should Laura do?

What is the problem or decision? Laura has to decide whether she is going to spend Helen's birthday with her, or if she will go to the concert.

What are the alternatives? Laura can ask Ruth if it is possible to get a ticket for Helen. Or Laura can tell Ruth that she has already made plans and can't go. Or Laura can go to the concert.

Who is involved? Laura, Ruth and Helen are involved.

What are the consequences of making one choice over the other?

If Laura can get a ticket for Helen and Helen wants to go, there is no dilemma. If Laura chooses to keep her plans with Helen, she will miss the concert. If she breaks her plans with Helen, she will see the concert but hurt Helen's feelings and their friendship.

If everyone made the decision you are leaning toward, what would the world be like? The only decision that Laura could make that would have bad consequences is if Laura decides to break her plans with Helen to go to the concert without her. Laura made plans with Helen some time in advance. Laura is the only friend that is planning on spending Helen's birthday with her. Laura promised Helen that she would celebrate with her. If Laura goes to

the concert without Helen, she could really hurt Helen's feelings and show that she is not a very thoughtful friend. She would break her promise to Helen and may damage or destroy their friendship altogether. Laura might have a hard time enjoying the concert if she feels guilty about deserting Helen. If everyone cancelled out on their friends when something more exciting came up, people would not have very solid friendships. If everyone followed through with their commitments, the world would definitely benefit.



Journal

How can one good decision lead to another? How can one bad decision lead to another?



To Do

1. Make a list of as many tough decisions you can think of. As a group, go through the decision-making process for one of the items and write out all of the possible consequences for the alternatives involved. Discuss how someone can come to the point of making a right decision even when it is difficult to do so.
2. Look through the newspaper and find two articles. The first article should show how someone made a good choice and how that choice affected that person and other people. The other article should show how someone made a bad choice and how that choice affected that person and other people. Look at the first article with your partner and discuss how the situation would have been different if the person made a bad choice. Do the same with the second article. As a class, discuss how everyday choices can have a huge impact.



Key Points

- ☞ It is not always easy to make good decisions, but there are always positive results of being able to make a right decision.
- ☞ You have a lot of control over your life.

- ☞ Good decisions that you make now will have a positive impact on your future and possibly open up new choices to you.

Destiny is not a matter of chance. It is a matter of choice; it is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved.

William Jennings Bryan

