



Making Decision

Analyzing Risks and Benefits

LaToya's friends invited her to go inline skating with them in the city park. She had never done it before, but everyone said it was fun and that she would catch on quickly. LaToya wanted to go, but she worried about getting hurt just before basketball season started. Should she take the risk?

The risk may be worth taking if LaToya decides that the benefits are greater than the possible harm. For example, skiing is another activity that involves some risk of injury. Many people decide that skiing is worth the risk, however, because it is good exercise and fun. They also realize that there are ways they can reduce the risks involved.

Making responsible decisions is a sign of maturity. It shows that you are beginning to take control of your own well-being. How can you analyze the risks and benefits of an action you might take? The guidelines that follow will help you.



1 Identify the possible risks involved in taking this action.

A risk is a possible harmful outcome or consequence of taking a certain action. These negative consequences may be physical, emotional, legal, or social.

- ▶ Identify all the possible negative consequences of taking this action. Write them down.
- ▶ Determine if any of the negative consequences are likely to cause a serious injury.
- ▶ Rate the likelihood of each negative consequence actually happening, from 1 for highly likely to 5 for very unlikely.

2 Identify the possible benefits of taking this action.

- ▶ Identify all the possible positive consequences of taking this action. Write them down.
- ▶ Rate the importance of these benefits to you, from 1 for very important to 5 for not very important.

3 Determine what you could do to reduce the risk of injury.

Design a strategy to reduce the degree of risk involved and maximize the benefits. For example:

- ▶ **Knowledge and awareness:** LaToya could find out if she can rent or borrow protective equipment such as wrist, elbow, and knee guards. She could also find out what skating route has the fewest hills or pedestrians.
- ▶ **Ability:** LaToya could take a lesson in in-line skating before she goes with her friends.
- ▶ **State of mind:** LaToya could make sure she is well rested and not under the influence of alcohol or other drugs when she tries skating.
- ▶ **Environmental conditions:** LaToya could agree to go only if it had not been raining, so the paths wouldn't be slippery, or if her friends would stop skating before it got dark.



4 Determine if the benefits outweigh the risks.

- ▶ Analyze the risks and benefits you wrote down, including your ratings of the likelihood of negative consequences and the importance of the benefits to you. Also review your strategies for reducing the risk of injury.
- ▶ Ask yourself if the benefits outweigh the risks for you.
- ▶ Decide whether or not to take the action.



Practice the Skill

- Review LaToya's situation.
 - What are all the possible risks involved in going inline skating?
 - What are the possible benefits?
 - What are some other ways she could reduce the risks and increase the benefits of doing this activity?
 - What decision would you make after weighing the risks and benefits in this situation?
- Consider a recent action you have taken or are considering taking. Analyze the action for risks and benefits following the steps described here. What strategies could minimize the possible risks and increase the benefits? Do the benefits outweigh the risks? Why or why not?



Communicating

Developing Refusal Skills

Erica's friends are pressuring her to drink alcohol with them. Though Erica does not use drugs of any kind, she worries about what her friends will think if she refuses. Perhaps you have felt this way about saying no to your friends. Maybe you worried that if you refused, your friends would be disappointed or not want to hang out with you. You might even have decided to go along with your friends just to avoid the discomfort of saying no.

Refusing your friends is never easy. Nevertheless, being true to yourself and honest with friends are two important values. To refuse an offer convincingly, you may need to do more than say *no*. These guidelines can help you learn to say *no* in a way that tells others you mean it.

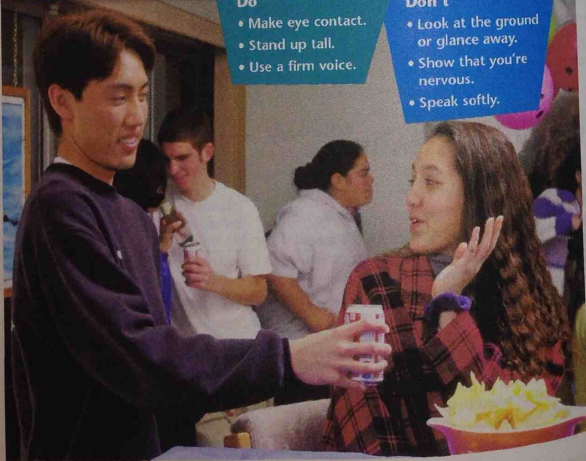
When You Refuse...

Do

- Make eye contact.
- Stand up tall.
- Use a firm voice.

Don't

- Look at the ground or glance away.
- Show that you're nervous.
- Speak softly.



1 Give a reason for your refusal.

When you say no, also state reasons for your refusal. Be honest—honest answers are more easily accepted by others. Some reasons might be:

- "I want to keep a clear head."
- "I could get suspended from the team."
- "I'd rather have a soft drink."

2 Use body language to reinforce what you say.

Your body language can either strengthen or weaken your message.

3 Show your concern for others.

Express your concern for those trying to persuade you. In the case of friends who have decided to drink, you might say things like:

- "I'd be really sad if anything happened to you."
- "Your parents would ground you for months if they ever found out."

4 Provide alternatives.

Try to persuade your friends to do something safer or more comfortable. Here are some suggestions:

- "I'm bored. Let's hang out at the Teen Center."
- "This isn't fun. Let's go to a movie."

5 Take a definite action.

If your friends still try to persuade you after you have made your feelings clear, it is best not to continue repeating the point. Instead, take a definite action that removes you from the situation. This will make it clear that you cannot be persuaded to change your mind.

If All Else Fails...

Get up and leave the party.

Call other friends and do something else.

Always call for help rather than ride with someone who has been drinking.



Practice the Skill

- Suppose that a friend asks you to sit close by during a test and share your answers.
 - How would your friend's request make you feel? Why?
 - If you were to refuse, what honest reason could you give? How would you express yourself?
 - What are some possible consequences of saying no? What are some possible consequences of saying yes?
- Think of two situations in which you said no to people who tried to convince you to do something you did not want to do.
 - Describe each situation. List the things that allowed you to refuse in each case.
 - In which situation was it more difficult to say no? Why?
 - Did you use any of the steps presented in this skill when you refused? If so, describe the steps and how effective they were.



Making Decisions

The DECIDE Process

You just found the perfect after-school job. It's near home, it will be fun, and it will pay for the bicycle you've wanted to buy. That same day, you find out that you finally made the basketball team. Unfortunately, team practices will occur during the hours you would need to be at work. How do you choose between the team and the job?

Many of your decisions are not this complicated, but some decisions are even more difficult. Such decisions require much thought and soul-searching because they can make an important difference in your life. Do you sometimes "hide from" tough choices because they make you feel anxious? Do you ever rush headlong into decisions without really thinking? There is a process, called DECIDE, that can help you think through decisions. This process is easy to remember because each letter in the word DECIDE stands for a step in the process.

Define the problem.

Consider the decision you are facing, and state the issue clearly. Is it important or complex enough to warrant using DECIDE? Some choices are so easy that you already know what to do. In other situations, your decision won't really make much difference—a flip of a coin would do.

Explore the alternatives.

Make a list of possible alternatives for solving your problem. Include "doing nothing" if it's appropriate. If you need more information to fully understand the problem or any of the alternatives, do the research now. You may find that some of the choices are unrealistic. If so, remove them from the list.



Consider the consequences.

One by one, think through what might happen if you were to choose each alternative on your list. Be sure to do the following.

- ▶ Include both positive and negative results.
- ▶ Consider what probably would happen, not what you hope would happen.
- ▶ Ask yourself: How risky is each alternative? What are its chances of success? How would it affect my future? Remember to consider the effects on other people as well.

Identify your values.

Sometimes your values influence your decisions even when you are not aware of the influence. At other times, you may overlook your values because you want something badly. When you do this, however, you may feel uncomfortable with your decision later.

- ▶ Consider your long-term goals as well as the beliefs of your family and culture.
- ▶ Consider your own and others' health and safety, and your self-respect.
- ▶ Identify those choices that are a good match for your values.

Decide and act.

- ▶ Use the information you have collected to compare the alternatives. Decide which one is best for you. Remember, sometimes there is more than one "right" choice.
- ▶ Make a plan to act on your decision. You may need to break the plan into smaller steps. Set realistic deadlines for each step. Then follow through with your plan.

Evaluate the results.

Sometime after you have put your decision into effect, take some time to review it.

- ▶ How did your decision work out?
- ▶ How has it affected your life?
- ▶ How has it affected others?
- ▶ What did you learn?
- ▶ If you could do it over again, what would you do differently? If you can still change some things for the better, do it now.



Practice the Skill

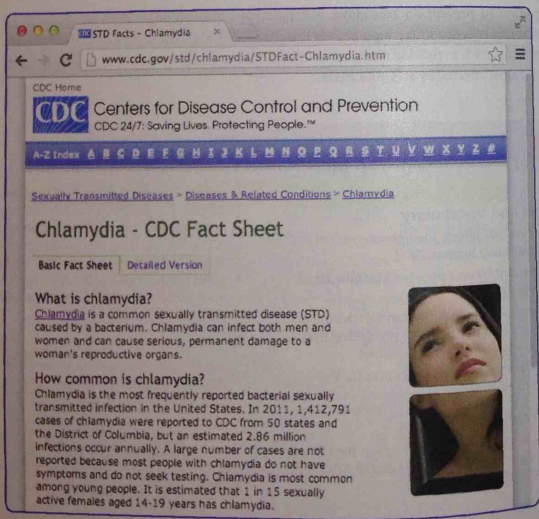
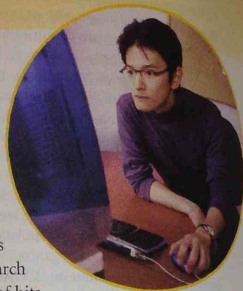
1. Suppose you were facing the decision described in the introduction—to choose the job or the team. Follow the steps of DECIDE to determine what you would do in this situation. Be sure to consider all alternatives; there may be more than two. (For example, it may be possible to postpone a choice or to take another route to a goal.)
2. List some other important decisions for which DECIDE might be useful. Do they fall into categories? What categories of decisions might not be suitable for DECIDE?
3. Think about a tough decision that you have made in the past or that you are facing now. Use DECIDE to determine what you should do (or should have done).
4. Did using DECIDE help you focus on important values or choices you might otherwise have overlooked? Which ones? Did DECIDE make the decision-making process easier? Why or why not?



Accessing Information

Evaluating Internet Sources

The amount of health information available on the Internet can be overwhelming. For example, suppose you wanted to learn more about one of the sexually transmitted infections discussed in this chapter. If you typed the name of the STI into a search engine, you would likely come up with thousands of hits. You can't possibly visit every site, so how do you decide which sites have accurate information? The following guidelines will help you evaluate the reliability of Internet sources. These guidelines apply to Internet sources on all kinds of topics, not just health topics.



1 Determine the type of Web site you are looking at and its purpose.

The Web address tells you what type of company or organization operates the site.

- ▶ A .gov in the address indicates that the site is run by a government organization. This type of site will usually provide reliable information. It may also represent the current administration's point of view.
- ▶ A .com or a .net indicates that it is a commercial site. A commercial site may provide information about products that are for sale. If the site is sponsored by the business that would profit from sales of those products, you probably will not find any negative information about the products on that site.
- ▶ A .edu indicates that an educational institution runs the site. Professors and students often post their own research on such sites.
- ▶ A .org indicates that a non-profit organization runs the site. Be aware of the organization's agenda as you consider its content.

2 Identify the author(s) of the site.

The author(s) should be indicated clearly at the top or bottom of the page, or on a page that is linked to the page you are looking at. What are the author's credentials? Is there contact information for the author? If it is not clear who takes responsibility for the content, it may not be reliable.

3 Determine if the information is current.

Many Web sites indicate when their content was last updated. Information on some topics may become out of date quickly. For example, if you are looking for the number of people who have been diagnosed with AIDS this year, you should look for a site that has been updated recently.

4 Determine the quality of the site.

Does the site look organized and professional, or does it look like it was put together haphazardly? Is the information presented in a straightforward way, or does it ramble?

5 Verify the information on the site with information from another source.

Does the site provide sources for the information it provides? If not, look elsewhere for information.



Practice the Skill

1. Go online and use a search engine to find a Web site on sexually transmitted infections and AIDS. See if you can answer the following questions based on the page you find:
 - a. Who is the author of the site?
 - b. What bias might the author have regarding the topic?
 - c. When was the site last updated?
 - d. What sources did the author use?
2. Based on your answers to the questions above, evaluate the reliability of the information on that Web site. Would you trust the information provided there? How would you verify that information?



Analyzing Influences

Thinking Critically About Health News

Every day, newspapers and magazines report the latest scientific findings on health topics. Sometimes, it may seem that this information changes from day to day. For example, one day you might read that a certain food is good for you. The next day, you may read that the same food can lead to health problems.

How can you sort out all the information? When reviewing new health information, keep a critical, but open, mind. Use the following questions to evaluate health reports.



1 Who conducted the research?

Find out the credentials of the person or group who conducted the research. Usually, health professionals are the best-qualified researchers.

2 Is the source trustworthy?

Always consider the type of source where the information appears.

- ▶ The most reliable sources are medical or scientific journals. These journals only accept articles that have been thoroughly reviewed by experts.
- ▶ Articles written by trained health or science writers also are generally reliable. These people have been trained in how to report scientific findings accurately.
- ▶ The least reliable sources are ads or publications funded by people with a financial interest in the information.

3 Is the evidence convincing?

Assess the quality of the evidence upon which the news is based. Look for signs of weak evidence.

- ▶ Vague statements that lack supporting information, such as “doctors recommend.”
- ▶ Statements based on opinions rather than experimental results.
- ▶ Phrases such as “in animals,” “of that age group,” or “in laboratory tests,” indicate that the findings may not be applicable to all groups.

4 Has the information been verified?

The best way to assess new health information is to compare findings in more than one reliable source. When a number of researchers report similar findings, the results are more likely to be accurate. However, this is not always easy. Experts often disagree about conclusions drawn from the same information. But becoming familiar with all the views on an issue can help you make decisions based on the best available information.



Practice the Skill

1. Find an article from a local newspaper or a popular magazine that discusses health information related to nutrition.
2. Evaluate the article by asking the following questions.
 - ▶ Who conducted the research?
 - ▶ Is the source of the information trustworthy? Explain.
 - ▶ Is the evidence convincing? Why or why not?
3. Find out whether the information has been supported by other studies. Summarize your findings.
4. Based on your evaluation, do you think you can trust the information in the article? Explain your viewpoint. **WRITING**





Analyzing Influences

Recognizing Misleading Claims

Each year millions of people spend billions of dollars on fraudulent health products, such as weight-loss aids, supplements, and “miracle” skin products. Many of these consumers fall victim to the persuasive product claims found in advertisements. In some situations, the loss is just monetary. But sometimes, people put their health at risk too. For example, people might not seek needed treatment from a healthcare professional if they think they have found their own “cure.” These guidelines can help you avoid being a victim of misleading product claims.

Fight acne with Acne B-Gone!

“If you use Acne B-Gone, you will have perfect, blemish-free skin!”

Have clear, glowing beautiful skin!

Guaranteed—or your money back!

Acne B-Gone has a special, secret ingredient that prevents pimples from forming. Scientists have proven that Acne B-Gone works better than any other product.

1 Examine the product’s claims for misleading information.

Ask yourself these questions.

- ▶ **Do any of the claims contradict common knowledge?** For example, a diet supplement that promises weight loss without the need to change eating and exercise habits should not be taken seriously.
- ▶ **What wording is used in the claim?** Be wary of words and phrases such as miracle, secret ingredient, ancient remedy, or scientific breakthrough.
- ▶ **Is the claim based on a testimonial?** An endorsement from a famous person or a “happy customer” may convince people that a product works.
- ▶ **Can scientific studies be verified?** A claim may state that the product has proven effective in scientific studies. However, the claim will probably offer little information about the actual studies.
- ▶ **Does the ad use “hurry up” techniques?** Some ads may claim that there are only limited quantities available to push you into making a quick decision.
- ▶ **Does the ad promise you a money-back guarantee?** You should not count on these guarantees. It is not always easy or possible to get your money back.

2 Try to check any claims made about the product.

- ▶ Before purchasing a product, read the packaging information, including the fine print. Does any of the information indicate the product is actually less effective or suitable than the claims imply?
- ▶ If you are unsure about the language used on the packaging, ask a healthcare professional for advice.

3 Request more information.

You can request more information from the product’s manufacturer about any claims that seem suspicious. Or, you could visit the web site of the Federal Trade Commission to search for any customer complaints made about the particular manufacturer.



Practice the Skill

1. Analyze the ad for Acne-B-Gone.
 - a. Describe the claims made by the ad.
 - b. Do any of the claims make you suspicious? Why or why not?
2. Analyze three other magazine or television advertisements for personal-care products such as hairstyling products or deodorants.
 - a. Evaluate whether the ads include misleading or suspicious claims.
 - b. Look for one of the products in a local store. Does any of the packaging information indicate that the product is less effective than the ad implied?
3. Find an ad that makes claims about a scientific study that supports the effectiveness of the product.
 - a. List some questions you would like to have answered about the study to believe its claims.
 - b. How could you find this information?

Examining Advertising Tactics

Tobacco companies used to spend billions of dollars a year to advertise their products. Their ads appeared on television, in magazines, in newspapers, and on billboards.

Why do companies spend so much money on advertising? The ultimate goal of advertising, of course, is to increase a company's profits. To do this, advertising is used to attract new users, increase customer use of a product, or to persuade people to switch brands. On a daily basis, you are bombarded with hundreds of advertisements. Use the following guidelines to help you identify and resist the techniques that advertisers use to influence you.



1 Identify the tactics being used to sell the product.

These are some common advertising techniques.

- ▶ **Humor** Funny ads may cause you to associate a product with fun or feeling good.
- ▶ **Slogans and Jingles** Catchy phrases or tunes may help you remember the product.
- ▶ **Testimonials** "Satisfied customers" may convince you that the product works.
- ▶ **Attractive Models** The use of attractive models communicates the idea that attractive or successful people use the product.
- ▶ **Positive Images** The ad may imply that you need the product to be strong, independent, and successful.
- ▶ **Bandwagon Approach** The ad makes you think that everyone uses the product. You may want to "jump on the bandwagon" too.
- ▶ **Appeal to the Senses** The use of beautiful or exciting scenery, colors, or music appeals to the senses.
- ▶ **Price Appeal** The ad may imply the product is a better bargain than other products.

2 Identify the ad's target audience.

These questions can help you determine whom an ad is trying to reach.

- ▶ In what setting does the ad take place? If it is a sporting event, for example, the ad is probably targeted at sports fans.
- ▶ What are the characters in the ad doing? If they are doing the latest fad, the ad may be targeted at teens or young adults.
- ▶ Where does the ad appear? Advertisers know which television shows and magazines attract the audience they want to reach.

3 Identify the ad's message.

What exactly is the ad trying to convince you to believe?

- ▶ Write a one-sentence statement that describes what the ad wants you to believe about the product. Start your sentence as follows, "If I use this product, then . . ." For example, "If I use this product, then I will be happier and have more friends."
- ▶ Reread the statement you wrote. Do you think it could be true? Why or why not?

Practice the Skill

1. Examine the ad for a tobacco product on the previous page.
 - a. Identify the tactics being used by the advertiser.
 - b. Who do you think the ad is trying to reach? What is its message?
2. Search the Internet for vintage print ads for tobacco products. In this case, *vintage* means classic or old. Some Web sites have print ads grouped by decade.
3. Select and print three different cigarette ads. For each ad, describe the setting, characters, and behaviors. Decide which tactic is being used to sell the product. Then write a one-sentence statement that expresses the ad's message as you see it.
4. Work in a small group and compare ads. Identify the most common messages in cigarette ads. Are there different messages for different audiences? How have the messages changed over time?
5. Use one or more of the advertising tactics described to make an anti-tobacco poster.