

Instructor Notes

Which Side to Choose? An Exercise in Choices and Ethics

In this exercise, you will read a question or phrase to the class and participants will express their personal agreement or disagreement. This can be used as a starting point for a discussion on how we make personal choices.



The activity is written for workshop participants and may need modification for classroom use.

Suggested Background Reading

- A Scientific View of Risk

National Science Education Standards for Grades 5–12

Science in Personal and Social Perspectives

- Personal and Community Health
Personal choice concerning fitness and health involves multiple factors. Students evaluate their reaction to a series of statements to learn that personal choices are based on personal goals, peer and social pressures, ethnic and religious beliefs, and the understanding of biological consequences.
- Natural and Human-Induced Hazards
Natural and human-induced hazards present the need for humans to assess potential danger and risk. Students assessing the costs and trade-offs of various health and environmental hazards realize that the scale of adverse events and the accuracy with which scientists and engineers predict these events are important considerations.
- Risks and Benefits
Students understand the risks associated with natural, chemical, biological, social, and personal hazards. By evaluating their attitudes toward these risks, students learn more about how they make ethical and personal choices.

Procedure Notes and Outcomes

The activity begins with general personal choices and moves into questions dealing more specifically with risk. Designate one side of the room to represent “agree” and the other to represent “disagree.” Read each statement in the list below to the class and have each participant move to one side of the room or the other to demonstrate their agreement or disagreement. You may wish to add your own agree/disagree statements.

1. There are times when cheating can be justified.
2. You would work at a job you didn't enjoy if it offered you \$25,000 per year more than you make now.
3. There is nothing wrong with using oral contraceptives as a form of birth control.
4. You would voice an ethical concern to a boss even if it could cost you your job.
5. You would never take off early or come in late to work even if you knew no one would catch you.
6. You have wanted to participate in a demonstration.
7. You have a strong affiliation with one particular political party.
8. Your district should adopt year-round schooling.
9. The general public cannot understand the majority of research currently performed in the scientific community.
10. The label for a certain artificial sweetener reads "Use of this product may be hazardous to your health. This product contains saccharin, which has been determined to cause cancer in laboratory animals." You would still order a diet soft drink or tea with this sweetener.
11. No level of risk is acceptable for a carcinogen (cancer-causing substance).
12. Animals should be given human genes to grow human transplant organs.
13. You are the owner of a small printing company. You must choose whether to adopt a more environmentally friendly waste-disposal system that is not currently required by EPA guidelines. This system will cost 35% of your current year's profits. After a long deliberation, you choose not to install the system.
14. It is reasonable that many waste facilities are placed in the poorest parts of the state or county.
15. All American corporations should institute mandatory HIV testing.
16. The risks of a new corporation should be made public to the surrounding communities prior to the inception of the new facility.
17. You are genuinely concerned about the risks of sun exposure and melanoma.
18. You now have a better understanding of your own thought processes, ethics, and personal choices.

After responding to all the statements, discuss as a class or in groups whether it was easy to make a clear-cut decision about all the statements. Also discuss whether it was difficult to hold a minority viewpoint for any of the statements.

If time permits, discuss each question and ask a particular participant why he or she chose that side of the room. How would this person convince his or her classmates that this was the “right” choice? This activity can be adapted to fit a variety of topics, such as personal health and ethics, using a collection of statements written to fit the subject.

Reference

Activity adapted from Simon, S.B.; Howe, L.W.; Kirschenbaum, H. *Values Clarification: A Handbook of Practical Strategies for Teachers and Students*; Hart: New York, 1972.