

TEACHER 'S GUIDE

This exploration of ethics and ethical decision making has been designed by the Institute for Global Ethics for use at the elementary school grade levels. It is based on Rushworth M. Kidder's book *How Good People Make Tough Choices: Resolving the Dilemmas of Ethical Living* (Simon & Schuster, 1995). The lessons take students through a series of logical, concrete steps so they can learn to independently apply specific decision-making tools to ethical issues they might encounter now or in the future. The process works best in a small-group or classroom setting.

GOALS OF *Elementary Decision Skills*

- To cultivate awareness that “we’re all in this together,” and that our consideration of each other is essential
- To provide a language for talking about key ethics concepts, and to encourage discussion of ethical issues
- To provide practical experience with core values as the underpinning to common ethical ground
- To promote Ethical Fitness™ by providing tools and experiences in analyzing and resolving tough ethical dilemmas

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing all the lessons in this curriculum, students should be able to:

- Understand the basic responsibilities of working in any group
- Use some ethics terminology appropriately and consistently
- Recognize choices and understand that some choices are between right and wrong
- Understand that some choices are a conflict of right versus right
- Analyze, to some degree, right-versus-right dilemmas based on two paradigms

THE CONCEPT “BUILD”

Elementary Decision Skills is organized by concepts that build on one another as follows:

AWARENESS

To begin a study of ethics, one must realize that ethics is about “doing the right thing” within a close or expansive context. To make that realization, children need to understand that each person is a part of something larger, and that each person's behavior and decision making can impact others. Lessons 1 through 3 build this awareness by giving

students the opportunity to practice group skills and to think about the important role each member plays in a group.

VALUES

Ethical values represent the foundation blocks or underpinnings of ethical decision making. Our approach does not promote a particular set of values, but promotes a process for defining the values of their group. Our research shows, however, that there is widespread agreement about core ethical values across ages, cultures, and gender. Lesson 4 helps students begin to understand the meaning and importance of ethical values. Our consensus process for defining values, which can be used with parents, is detailed in the Resources section.

DECISION MAKING

After exploring their core values, students will learn how these values feature in the tough decisions they face every day. Lessons 5 through 8 give students the opportunity to work with several important concepts in ethical decision making. First they learn to identify choices. Then they learn about some tests to determine if a choice is wrong. Finally, they learn about two of the right-versus-right dilemma paradigms.

TIME FRAME

Since each lesson in the curriculum includes a series of hands-on activities, the time needed to complete each lesson will vary, but most activities are designed to fit a 30- to 40-minute class period. All of the activities can be completed in roughly 11 weeks (see the suggested time frame, page 7).

Once all lessons are completed, expect concepts to surface in the life of the classroom again and again. The sooner students are well versed in the concepts, the sooner they can transfer and apply these ethics ideas to the context of their daily lives.

Consequently, it is best to start this curriculum at the beginning of the school year, even though it can be carried out at any time. While we do not recommend that you rush through the curriculum, it is most effective if integrated consistently so students can clearly experience the progression of ideas (rather than working with it from time to time throughout the school year). If you do need to stop and then pick it up later, we recommend that you plan to do so around the three general concept areas: Awareness, Values, and Decision Making.

If you offer the optional values definition process activity for parents (Defining a Common Set of Values: A Parent Activity), it is best to do it at the beginning of the year (see Lesson Plan 4). This process will introduce the curriculum to parents, and you can use the resulting list of values later in the curriculum.

DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS

Each part of *Elementary Decision Skills* promotes critical thinking skills. At any and every appropriate opportunity, students should be encouraged to analyze, synthesize, and extend ideas. At the same time, developmental needs must always be respected. We want students to become “ethically fit” through this process. We do not want students to come away from these experiences feeling “ethically incompetent” or feeling that ethics is irrelevant. A teacher sensitive to students’ individual abilities and developmental levels can lead all students to a sense of success and ownership in the process of ethical decision making. Be aware that the opposite could result in confusion, bewilderment, or apathy.

INTEGRATION

Once students learn these ethics concepts, related “teachable moments” will spring up in all areas of learning.

- Use the language and refer to the concepts when addressing affective areas like playground behavior, collaboration skills, and independent learning.
- If schoolwide issues are discussed in your class, tie in the ethics and values concepts students are learning, and watch for evidence that they, also, are making this connection.
- If you work with local or larger news issues, continue to weave the ethics thread throughout. Keep track of how often and how naturally your students do the same.
- Be on the lookout for opportunities to weave ethics concepts into literature, history, science, or math lessons.
- Make ethics a regular part of your school/home communication.

The more often teachers can make connections across the curriculum and beyond, the more meaning and value they build into the theme of ethical behavior, or “doing what’s right.”

REFLECTION

Revisiting ethics concepts will occur naturally, especially if every attempt is made to integrate across the curriculum. But reflection should also be implemented as a formal and ongoing part of the student experience. To this end, each *Elementary Decision Skills* lesson produces a permanent visual reminder (a “class graphic”) designed to help students think over what they have learned. These reminders, if posted in the classroom permanently, will serve as a tool for revisiting the curriculum from time to time throughout the school year.

WAYS TO TELL IT’S WORKING

The class graphic component of each lesson also serves as an opportunity to assess student learning during the lesson. We have also provided a simple assessment tool at the

end of each section (see the chart on page vii). However, there are many other ways to measure whether or not the curriculum is working.

Students should look forward to working with *Elementary Decision Skills* from day to day and week to week. Enthusiasm and energy level should be high. Students should be internally motivated to pay attention, and they should be independent, efficient, and productive during small-group work. If they are not, make sure to find out why. Is the work too easy or is it somehow threatening? Are students being given enough opportunities for self-expression, or do they view the work as predictable, formulaic, and “canned”? Do they feel that they own the learning that takes place, and do they understand its relevance to their own lives?

Along with these indicators, you can measure the program’s effectiveness by how naturally learning is “transferred” to other aspects of the school setting. Classroom management issues should subside or at least improve, because students are learning to get along with one another better, and learning the importance of treating each other with respect. References to the concepts learned in *Elementary Decision Skills* should come out frequently and naturally in various contexts during other parts of the day.

RELATED CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

LANGUAGE

As educational research confirms, language development is an essential element to the success of this kind of program. Key words are listed in each lesson plan. Although specific vocabulary exercises are not included in *Elementary Decision Skills*, they may be necessary as in any new learning material. Ellie Wrobel, one of our pilot teachers, put it this way:

Language is so important. Our district has a 25 percent limited-English population, and other districts have even more, some over 75 percent. Kids can’t understand concepts if they can’t understand what words mean. So, lots of vocabulary, word study, definitions, etc. are important.

Teachers must be familiar with the vocabulary scope of their students, and make sure to carefully explain any new words introduced in handouts, worksheets, and activities in this curriculum.

POSITIVE CLIMATE

In Thomas Lickona’s landmark book *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* (Bantam Books, 1989) he describes several specific strategies for developing a positive climate in the classroom. Strategies easily developed through *Elementary Decision Skills* include:

- Teachers who model ethical thinking and behavior
- Moral expectations: consistent attention to ethical standards regarding behavior

- Discipline based on established values
- Some shared decision making
- Cooperative learning experiences
- Frequent moral reflection
- Instruction in conflict resolution
- Caring beyond the classroom
- Parents as active partners

For more information about these approaches, visit the Web site of the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs at www.cortland.edu/www/c4n5rs/.

PLENTY OF HEROES

Some things never change, and as human beings we will always need and want heroes to emulate. Make sure that you are providing your students with plenty of “ethical heroes” to learn from and aspire toward. Giraffe Heroes is one good resource. Find out more about this curriculum and other ideas at the Giraffe Project Web site: www.giraffe.org.

PEER TUTORING

We know from experience that older students often make very effective teachers. Whenever possible, we encourage teachers to have older students assist with or even carry out these ethics activities with youngsters. These tutoring opportunities generally prove beneficial to both parties. Older students often become strong advocates for ethics and personal responsibility as their own awareness builds through their roles as tutors. Furthermore, the positive role modeling inherent in such a process gives younger students a clear message about the importance and value of ethics. As with any peer tutoring experience, success depends on careful preparation and monitoring by the teacher.

TIME FRAME FOR *ELEMENTARY DECISION SKILLS*

This is one suggestion for how to work through *Elementary Decision Skills* for grades K–2. You should decide what pace best fits your class and group of students.

WEEKS ONE & TWO—AWARENESS

LESSON 1: I'M A MEMBER OF A GROUP

- Three 20-minute activities: Classroom Web, Water Circles, I'm a Member of a Group

LESSON 2: GROUP WORK NEEDS CARING

- One 30-minute activity: Routine Upset
- Two 20- to 30-minute activities: Roaming the Room, Who Cares?

LESSON 3: GROUP WORK NEEDS LISTENING AND SPEAKING

- Three 30- to 40-minute activities: Listening Ladders, Cloze Hangers, Cloze Hangers II

WEEKS FOUR TO EIGHT—VALUES*

LESSON 4: EXPLORING VALUES

- Five 20-minute activities per target value: Exploring Literature, Acting Out Literature, Student Experiences, Values Chart, Values Mobile
- Two ongoing activities: Values Box, Home Log

* Completion time for the Values section, Lesson 4, depends on a number of variables, especially how many values you choose to target

WEEKS NINE TO ELEVEN—DECISION MAKING

LESSON 5: WHAT ARE THE CHOICES?

- One 20-minute activity: What Are the Choices?
- Two 20-minute activities: Stories to Analyze: “Mr. Moffit,” “Alfie’s Favorite Walk”

LESSON 6: WHICH CHOICE IS WRONG?

- Four 20-minute activities: The Four Tests for Wrong: “Chores,” “Swim Contest,” “Helping Ralph,” “Saturday Plans”

LESSON 7: CHOOSING BETWEEN NOW AND LATER

- One 20-minute activity: Choosing Between Now and Later
- Three 20-minute activities: Stories to Analyze: “Short and Long on Food,” “Short and Long on Camping,” “Short and Long on Saturday”

LESSON 8: CHOOSING BETWEEN ONE AND MANY

- One 20-minute activity: Choosing Between One and Many
- Three 20-minute activities: Stories to Analyze: “Jared and the Soccer Team,” “Marcia and the Gardners,” “Jeff and the Class Project”

DEFINING A COMMON SET OF VALUES: A PARENT ACTIVITY

This optional values definition process for parents will take up to three hours to complete. It is suggested you do it at the beginning of the school year.