



HONE DECISION-MAKING SKILLS

Clergy sexual abuse crisis, part 4 of 4

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ABUSIVE ADULTS, INCLUDING SEXUAL PREDATORS, infect our society by using the weapons of secrecy, fear, isolation, and power to victimize the vulnerable. When an abuser holds a position of authority or admiration, it is easy for a child to think, "If HE/SHE says this is good, or right, or God's will, then it must be." "HE/SHE knows more about God than I do. I should trust." "HE/SHE said that this was our secret. I can't tell anyone."

I agree with Benjamin Franklin's advice: "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." For all situations in life — good, bad, and indifferent — children need decision-making skills. Be proactive. Engage your child in ways to discern whether a choice is life-giving or life-blocking. Discuss scenarios from real-life dilemmas, TV dramas, cartoons, or stories. Help your child to apply this four-step rubric for decision-making.

SCENARIO: A student is tempted to cheat on a test

Step 1: Explore the situation honestly.

Be objective. List the facts. Consider goals, alternatives, and obligations. Every choice has a plus and a minus; every action has consequences. How does this decision "fit" your obligations as a child of God, a member of your family, and the personal identity that you desire?

Step 2: Seek advice from trusted sources of wisdom.

- Consult Scripture, especially the teachings of Jesus. What advice

emerges about cheating, dishonesty, and integrity?

- Reflect on Church Tradition. What do the Seventh and Eighth Commandments encourage? What would saints like Thomas More or Joan of Arc advise?

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- Talk to a trusted adult. Discuss your dilemma with someone with whom you can be honest, knowing that he or she will listen, keep your confidence (unless you or someone else are in danger), and offer you advice — but will leave you free to make your own decision.

Step 3: Pray to know the will of God.

It is the will of God that you use your intellect and free will to make the best decisions. Try these five strategies:


- Name your motives. What is your reason for wanting to cheat?

- Identify your values and priorities. Is cheating or lying typical for you?
- Determine the "most helpful" or "least harmful" choice.
- Ask: "What would Jesus do?"
- Talk with Jesus about the decision.

Step 4: Mentally test the decision before acting on it.

Imagine that you cheat on the test. Then apply one or all of the following to prove the worth of your decision.

- Role reversal — Be the teacher who discovers the fraud.
- Publicity — It becomes common knowledge that you cheated.
- The day after — Predict how you will feel about yourself the next day.
- Generalizability — Suppose every student cheated?

"Sometimes you will never know the value of a moment until it becomes a memory," Dr. Seuss observed. Make choices today that create satisfying memories tomorrow. 

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