
SESSION 3

Objectives:

- To understand how people make choices.
- To recognize personal patterns in making choices.
- To recognize how they experience anxiety.
- To learn some strategies for dealing with anxiety.
- To look at personal strategies for dealing with stress.

Outline:

- Choices
- Giving choices away

Split Session Option

- Anxiety
- Coping

Updating

Did anyone set any new goals?

How are you working toward those goals?

Are you feeling successful or do you need to rethink your goals or "chunk down?"

Today we're going to talk about making choices.

Choices

What is choice?

Why are choices important?

Part of what we're doing in this group is looking at what choices we make every day and how that affects our lives.

Have any of you ever felt trapped, that you have "no choice?"

That is a very real feeling, but there are usually lots of different choices to be made if you stop and look for them.

Making choices is a little like going into a restaurant.

Flip Chart 12

MENU

- ✓ Hot dog
 - ✓ Corn dog
 - ✓ Chili dog
 - ✓ Super dog
-

Making choices can help your life move along or keep you stuck.

For example, if you order one of the “dogs” on the menu, you’ll be happy, filled up and ready to go to the movies.

Can anyone tell me why deciding to have pizza or chicken at this restaurant may lead you to feel frustrated, upset or hungry?

Making choices isn’t picking what you want out of the sky, it is:

- looking at what you want;
- looking at what is possible; and
- looking at what you expect to happen if you make a particular choice.

At the same time, there are people older, bigger and stronger than you that definitely have some control over your lives.

**Some of that control is healthy and helps you to grow.
Some of it can hurt you.**

**But even in the worst situations, you have choices you
can make.**

*If you understand ahead of time how choices work, you will be
smarter about the choices you make.*

Giving Choices Away

**Some people give their choices away, for example,
letting your parents order your meals, decide what you
wear. etc.**

**People sometimes give their choice away by asking other
people to solve their problems. They become helpless
and let other people take care of them.**

**Can any of you think of some times that you've given
your choice away?**

How did it make you feel?

Looking to other people for the answers, or trying to
figure out what someone else thinks is the right
answer, is something grown ups actually teach kids.

**Have any of you known teachers or other adults who
seem to really like the kids with all the right answers?**

We call that being Answer-centered.

**But, when you do this in your life, it puts everyone in
control of your life but you — so you feel more and more**

like you have no choices. You gradually give up the ability to think for your self.

This group is not about answers, it is about learning to think for yourself, about learning to make choices and solve problems your way.

Optional Exercise Follow-up

If they completed the exercise "Things I Think and Feel About" ask who would like to share some ways in which they might make different choices based on what they've learned from doing the exercise? Are there some ways in which they've given their choices away? Or are there things they haven't communicated that they would like to?

Story

Let me tell you a story about problem-solving and choices.

Once a traveler and his donkey were entering a small village in a faraway country. As he trudged down the dusty road, he saw an old man looking for something in the dirt by the road. The traveler came closer and asked the man what he was looking for. The old man looked up and said he was looking for his key. The traveler offered to help and pretty soon they were both looking in the dusty road for the key.

After a few minutes, when they had not found the key, the traveler asked, "We should have found the key by now. Where were you when you lost it?" The old man answered him, "Oh, I was over there in my hut," pointing to a small house a few yards away. "Then why are we looking for the key out here?" asked the traveler? "Because, it's dark inside the hut."

What do you think about the old man's way of solving his problem?

Do we do that when we look outside ourselves for other people to solve our problems? Is that a choice?

Learning to solve problems for yourself does not mean you have to solve them alone. Just like the old man, there are many people available to help you solve problems, to help you make choices.

But it's important to look inside yourself, to think about the options that other people suggest.

You can listen to the ideas of others and accept their help, but you and you alone can really decide what's right for you.

- Having control in your life is partly:
- looking at what choices you have;
- making a choice; and

- realizing there will be consequences that follow from your choices.

It doesn't mean you'll like all of them or that they will be easy, but choosing feels better than being a victim because you didn't know how to make a better choice.

Split Session Option

Go to Anxiety on page 76 if you are not splitting the session.

Optional Exercise:

Have each participant answer the following questions in his/her notebook or discuss them in the group.

- ✓ What are some of the things I do for myself?
- ✓ What are some things that other people do for me?
- ✓ Do I like the balance between things I do for myself and things that others do for me?
- ✓ Are there things I would like to change?
- ✓ What changes am I prepared to make this coming week?
- ✓ What do I need to communicate and to whom?

If the session will be conducted in two parts, go to the Selfwork exercises 1 and 2.

Re-entry for Split Session

If you are beginning a new session now, take a few minutes to talk about choices.

What did you notice since the last session about how you make choices?

Did you notice yourself giving your choices away?

Did you notice that things were easier at home if you did things before you were asked?

What ideas do you have about the power of choice?

Anxiety

There's a feeling we haven't talked about yet that's important to understand.

When you see someone you don't want to see, or have to do something you don't want to do, what happens in your body?

Allow for discussion, coming up with things like a nervous stomach when going to the doctor or dentist, being sent to the principal's office, etc.

What is that feeling of uneasy anticipation called?

Anxiety.

Feelings affect your body because your mind and body are part of you, just as your feelings and thoughts are part of you. You can't separate them.

Does anyone know what anxiety feels like in your body?

Flip chart 13

Common signs of anxiety include:

- ✓ heart pounding, sometimes loudly;
 - ✓ feel warm, cheeks flushed, ears get pink;
 - ✓ headache or feeling of pressure in your head;
 - ✓ mouth gets dry;
 - ✓ stomachache; and/or
 - ✓ sweating and clammy hands.
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What triggers or causes anxiety for you?

Anxiety is a sign from your body that you need to pay attention to what is going on.

But anxiety is also a very powerful emotion and it is important to remember that it is only a part of you, even when it feels bigger than you.

You may feel like you want to run away from it, to ignore it or to give in to it by withdrawing or going to sleep.

Anxiety can be a useful tool if you learn to understand it, to look it in the face and to respond to it.

What are some ways of dealing with anxiety?

Discuss.

Breathing is the most effective way to manage anxiety at the time it is happening.

Breathing is nature's simplest way of slowing you down, helping you to relax and bring things back into focus.

Since you breathe every minute of your life, it is a relaxation skill that you carry with you every minute, that you can use without anyone noticing.

You can do it with your eyes open, walking, sitting, whenever. One minute of breathing when things aren't going well can make a difference.

One of your Selfwork assignments this week is to do this once a day, whenever you choose.

Coping

Who can tell me what "coping" means?

Coping is another way people handle stress and anxiety.

Coping is a stopgap or short-term way of handling whatever is going on.

It doesn't solve problems or make things better in the long-term.

It helps gets you through the day.

People do lots of things to cope, to get some relief from whatever seems to be bothering them.

What are some of these?

Sleeping, eating, exercise, drinking alcohol, using drugs, withdrawing into a book or television or music. Some of these are obviously more healthy than others.

How could you cope more effectively with stress and anxiety?

Discussion

Action

Another way to deal with anxiety is to take action.

For example, if you are feeling anxious about talking to someone about a problem and you know you have to do it sooner or later, take action.

Decide how to begin, actually script out for yourself the first sentence or two. Think through the rest of what you want to say and then do it.

This is never easy, but once you begin, your anxiety about doing it is over.

Who can think of other examples, perhaps something you're feeling anxious about and avoiding doing. The group may be able to help you choose whether or not taking action is the thing to do.

Go through several examples looking at ways to get started, to take action as a way to get through a situation. This includes asking for help.

Relaxation

One of the most effective ways to lower your overall level of stress or anxiety is through relaxation including breathing and imagining.

Let's try a little imagining. Close your eyes, get comfortable and let your attention go to your breathing.

Breathe in through your nose to completely fill your lungs, pause only as long as is comfortable, slowly release the air through your mouth, emptying your lungs completely.

Breathe in to a count of four (one, two, three, four).

Now breathe out to a count of eight (one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight).

Now breathe in again and begin to count for yourself. If four and eight is not comfortable for you, use any pace that feels good to you.

Continue to just pay attention to the rhythm of your breathing for a minute now.

Let your body melt deeper and deeper into relaxation and quiet.

Now see yourself as your mother or father are talking to you about a problem.

Feel how hard it is to hear criticism and see yourself continuing to listen, to think about what is being said.

See yourself saying, "Thank you, this is hard to think about but I will think about it and look at what I might do differently."

Now see yourself receiving a compliment from a teacher or friend.

Notice how warm and wonderful it feels to have someone like you and think you are wonderful.

See yourself saying "Thank you" and giving that person a hug.

Now see yourself as a powerful person, someone you really like.

Feel how good it feels to like yourself, to know you can do things well, to know people like you and want to be around you.

Now take all of those thoughts and store them in your mind to draw upon all this next week as you go about practicing all the things we have talked about.

Now bring your thoughts back into the room, move around a bit in your chair and when you are ready, open your eyes.

Session 3 — Self-work activities

1. Be aware of the times that you make choices this week and the times when you give your choices away. Notice how both feel.

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2. When you know you're going to be asked to do something — like making your bed or doing your homework — choose to do it before you are asked and see how that feels.
 3. Do "Coping, Relaxation, Negative" activity sheet.
 4. Practice relaxation and breathing when you're in situations that are uncomfortable for you.
 5. Notice how often you do things that are coping, relaxing or not very effective.

Coping, Relaxation, Negative Activities

While there are many kinds of relaxation skills, they have to be learned and practiced in order to have value. They can help you to feel less torn apart, to understand yourself more fully, to help you settle down and think and act more clearly. And they feel GREAT!!

Place a C for Coping, R for Relaxation or N for negative activity beside each of the following:

Watch TV	Go for a walk
Throw rocks at a bottle	Listen to music
Go to sleep	Cut your hair
Eat something	Play an instrument
Breathe; focus attention	Read a book
Tease your baby brother	Play basketball
Lie down and daydream	Talk to a teacher
Have a soda and some doughnuts	Do your homework
Go visit a friend	Run away
Clean up your room	Go shopping
Call your grandmother	Write in a journal

You may notice yourself doing other things that are not on this list. Feel free to add them and place a C, R, N, or * next to any of them. Think about whether or not you want to alter any of your behavior. The first step is becoming aware and you've already done that with this activity.

Source: Earl Hipp *Fighting Invisible Tigers*

Dear Parents,

Making choices is an important part of taking responsibility for our lives and exercising control in our lives. We have been exploring a wide range of possible choices available in life situations; when you do or do not have choice, and anticipated consequences of the choices we make.

In addition to exploring a wide range of feelings, anxiety is one that we focused on as a group, discussing how it feels, what it is telling us, and understanding what can be done about it. This led us into exploring the various ways people handle stress and anxiety. These include:

- Coping

- Relaxation

- Destructive behavior

Please take a moment to look at the Coping, Relaxation, Negative Activities Worksheet. Consider how your family handles stress and what kinds of choices you make to relax.

Sincerely,

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✓ Corn dog

✓ Chili dog

✓ Super dog

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