



## Day Four: Ethics and Values in Decision-making

### Time Allowed

60 Minutes

### Teaching Format

Troop presentation

### Learning Objectives

As a result of this session, participants will be able to do the following:

1. Give a definition for “ethics” and discuss the importance of ethical decision making.
2. Describe three kinds of decisions (Right vs. Wrong / Right vs. Right / Trivial).
3. For each kind of decision, explain one approach to making an ethical choice.
4. Use the Checklist for Ethical Decision Making to test at least one choice involving a right vs. right situation.
5. Understand the relationship between ethics, trustworthiness, and loyalty.

### Materials Needed

- Visual aid(s) developed by presenter
- Computer
- LCD projector and screen
- Appropriate sound system for presentation venue
- Flipchart or whiteboard and markers
- Handout: Checklist for Ethical Decision-making (one per participant)

### Recommended Presenter

Scoutmaster

### Recommended Location

Troop assembly area (outside is ideal, weather permitting)

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## PRESENTATION OUTLINE

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### ***Presenter Notes:***

- The goal of this session is to have course participants overtly explore using ethics and values in their decision-making by considering dilemmas that sometimes make decisions difficult. It is not a place for any staff member—youth or adult—to grandstand by interjecting a particular societal or personal point of view. All staff should be made aware of this and counseled prior to delivery of this session.
- Because the point of this module is for each participant to be able to freely explore their ethics and values in making decisions, consider minimizing the number of staff present at this session so participants do not look to staff for the “right” answers and for staff approval. Be sure to have the minimum number of required adults present to ensure all Youth Protection guidelines are being followed.
- It is vital to provide participants with time and encouragement to share answers and receive positive feedback for participating early on. This creates the atmosphere of trust and safety, so that, later in this presentation, they will feel comfortable sharing their ideas and will feel validated.
- Arranging Scouts in a circle or semicircle works best with chairs that participants can retreat to after making a decision based on the scenario being discussed. A key aspect to this session is to have the participants physically move to the front or back, or to one side or another, when making their decision. It means no participant can hide; represents a “demonstration” of their deliberate decision; and makes the presentation more powerful, meaningful, and thought provoking.

### **Introduction (2 min)**

Begin by reading the following statement:

“This presentation will discuss ethics and values in decision-making. We will be exploring several scenarios where you will be asked to make decisions.

“For some of you, this will be the first time you will be called upon to search your feelings and make a decision. The goal is to show and understand the relationship between ethical decision-making, trustworthiness, and loyalty.

“Some of you may find it challenging, and some of you may not. Some of you may make one decision and some of you may make a different decision. Some of you may initially make one decision and then change after personal reflection. This is OK.

“Before we start, it is critically important for you all to know that in this session there are NO right or wrong answers, only YOUR answers (*this must be stressed*). Your decision will not be judged in any way.



“This session is designed to challenge you to decide what you would do in a given situation. It is most important you each be allowed to decide for yourself, choose your course of action, and then reflect on those decisions. As mentioned previously, upon reflection you may or may not decide to change your decisions, and it is very important that each of you understand that it is OK for you to do so.

“Again, there are no right or wrong answers, only your answers.”

### Opening Discussion (8 min)

**Note:** Guide participants to locate the Participant Notes sheet for this session in the Participant Notebook. Encourage them to be taking note of key words, key points, and their top three takeaways from the session.

Share the following quote, and ask for several volunteers to describe what it means.

“Our lives are the sum total of the choices we have made” —Wayne Dyer

Present participants with the situation that follows below, then lead a brief discussion about the situation. Have participants move to a location in or near your presentation area representing their decision.

Encourage them to share the decisions they would make and, more importantly, the means they used to arrive at those decisions. Allow a little chatting with the person sitting next to them.

This discussion allows them to talk through feelings and decisions at the “easy” stage of the exercise and puts them at ease with owning their decisions. The Scoutmaster presenting should support each decision equally, which builds validation and safety in making decisions and sharing in the coming scenarios.

(Remember, this is not time to impose your personal perspective on right and wrong. The purpose of this lesson is to have the participants explore *their* right and wrong. It is only by exercising their decision-making that participants can begin to be aware of and develop their decision-making abilities. Don’t be drawn into the trap of answering a question of what you would do beyond saying, “This is your decision to make.”)

### Scenario

You are the coach of a Little League baseball team about to play in a championship game. Team rules say that anyone who misses a practice without a good excuse can’t play in the next game. Your star pitcher has missed the last two practices and won’t tell you why. The team’s catcher tells you there are rumors that the pitcher is embarrassed because their dad was drinking and couldn’t drive the player to practice, but the catcher isn’t sure if the rumors are true. You know that according to team rules, you should bench the pitcher. You also know that without your best pitcher in the lineup, the team has no chance of doing well in the championship game.

Give participants the following choices (*have Scouts wait to move until you finish offering the three choices*):

"If you stick with the team rules and bench the pitcher even though you don't know the reason for the absences, step to the right of the meeting area."

"If you assume the rumors are true, and so you will let the pitcher play, step to the middle of the meeting area."

"If you would do what's best for the greatest number by letting the pitcher play and help the entire team succeed, step to the left of the meeting area."

### **Scenario Discussion**

Ask those in each group to discuss why they made the decision they did. Remind everyone that there is no right answer to this situation.

Ask if anyone would like to comment on why they chose to move where they are. Entertain their answers. If they don't bring it up, ask them if any of them were influenced to decide as they did because they saw others in their group moving to one part of the meeting area.

During the debrief, it is very important that the Scoutmaster (and any other staff members present) does not interrupt or make any comment whatsoever, whether it be verbal or simply raised eyebrows. This is the participants' time to explore their decision-making and answer themselves honestly.

Take answers from each of the three groups. If no one offers to answer, the Scoutmaster should provide an answer to each decision, which offers a positive reason why that decision is a logical and appropriate answer. It is by exposure to these divergent, but also valid, viewpoints that NYLT participants will start to reflect inwardly on their own, probably until now, unquestioned decision-making basis.

The point of this discussion is not to decide the "right" answer to the situation in question. In fact, each situation may have a variety of "right" answers. The point of the discussion is to get the participants thinking about *how* they arrive at ethical decisions.

Ask participants to return to their seats. Again, provide time for a debrief with those sitting next to them.

### **Explaining Ethical Decision-making (15 min)**

Ask participants if any of them can tell you the Scouting America Mission Statement.

If someone can recite it, have them do so. Also, have it available on a flip chart to show as your prepared visual aid. Either show the flip chart after the participant recites the mission or show it so one of the participants may read it aloud.

*The mission of Scouting America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Scout Law.*

A mission statement is the primary objective of an organization.



If a key element of the Scouting America Mission Statement is “make ethical . . . choices,” that must be mighty important—so important that we want to spend plenty of time exploring what it means.

### ***Exploring the Mission Statement***

If we are going to be able to make ethical choices, we should at least understand what the words mean.

**Ask:** What does the word “choices” mean?

Collect a few answers from participants. They should essentially get to “several ways to do something” or “several answers to a question,” and we need to select one of them.

**Ask:** “Ethical” comes from the word “ethics,” so, what are ethics?

Lead the group in coming up with a working definition of the word “ethics.” As they offer ideas, write them on the flip chart. Two answers to draw out are the following:

- An understanding of what is right and wrong for an individual and for a group of people.
- The standards by which we act, both when we are around others and when we are alone.

Next, ask the group for their ideas about where ethics come from. Write their answers on the flip chart. An important idea to draw out is that ethics develop, in large part, from the values a person gains from their family, their society, and their cultural traditions.

### ***An Example of Ethics***

Ask the group if they recognize these words and can identify where they come from?

*“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”*

**Answer:** The second paragraph of the “Declaration of Independence.”

For most people who live in the United States, we accept these ideas as obvious values. As Americans, they are part of our shared ethic.

### ***Codes of Conduct***

Ask if any participants attend a school that has a code of conduct. What are other examples of places or activities that have codes of conduct? Entertain several answers (e.g., NYLT; their troop, crew or ship; a sports team; a theme park; airplanes; etc.).

Why are these codes in place? What makes them effective or ineffective. Entertain several answers.

Use participants' examples and comments to explore the general idea of codes of conduct—that they are agreements among people as to generally accepted standards of behavior. Specific items in codes of behavior may be included to make it possible for people to live and work together effectively.

Some say that ethics are determined largely by what most people believe to be appropriate decision-making behavior. Without generally accepted standards, we would have trouble coming to agreement on much of anything. It would be much more difficult to function as a society.

### ***Ask and Discuss***

**Ask:** Why should people be ethical? (A contrasting question would be, “What would happen if people were not ethical?”)

Possible answers may include the following:

- To develop trust
- To show mutual respect for others
- To create a just and fair society

**Ask:** Why would anybody *not* follow a code of ethics?

Possible answers may include the following:

- I'm just one person, so it doesn't really matter what I do.
- If I stand up for a belief, people won't like me.
- The chance to do something went by really fast.
- It would cost too much to do the right thing.
- Sometimes I don't know what I should do.

### **Steps to Ethical Decision-making (15 min)**

Life is about choices. Some are big choices; some are small. There are some very clear steps we can follow to make choices that are in keeping with our ethical beliefs. Let's look at them before we consider a few decisions people have faced.

#### ***Step One: Getting the Facts Straight***

Any attempt to make a good decision has to begin with getting the facts of the situation straight. In some cases that at first seem quite difficult, additional facts are enough to make the correct course of action apparent. If, for example, we wish to decide how much of our forests should be cut down now, and how much should be left for future generations, we first need to establish some facts about the rate at which forests regenerate. These facts might be ascertained through science or just through the experiences of people who have observed forests over long periods of time.

#### ***Step Two: Figure Out What Kind of Choice It Is***

The categories of choices are:

- Those that are **trivial**



- Those that are **right vs. wrong**
- Those that are **right vs. right**

### ***Trivial Decisions***

Why did you choose the seat you took when you came to this session? Is it a decision that really matters? Probably not. What about this choice: You can watch television or you can do your homework. Or this one: You can set your alarm and get up on time or you can sleep in and be late for school. What would you do? These are decisions that do not require much thought. If you don't do your homework because you choose to watch television, you will have to complete your schoolwork later. Your grades might suffer. You won't feel very good about yourself. If you sleep in rather than getting to class on time, you might have to stay after school. Your grades might suffer. You'll miss being with your friends. Decisions like this are **trivial** not because the outcome doesn't matter, but because they're usually very clear and the consequences are known. They don't require deep ethical thinking to figure them out. "If I do this, then that will be the result."

### ***Right vs. Wrong Decisions***

Consider this choice: The clerk at a store has left the building, and you are alone. Nobody would ever know if you slipped a candy bar into your pocket and left without paying. Or this one: A friend tells you he has a copy of the answers to a difficult math test you are to take tomorrow and that you can look at it if you want. What would you do? Would you take the candy bar? Would you borrow the test answers? These are **right vs. wrong** choices. There is a clear right course of action and a clear wrong course. These are no-brainers—you don't need to have serious ethical decision-making debates with yourself to know that you shouldn't steal the candy or look at the test. Whenever we know that one choice is the right one and another is the wrong one, we all know that the right thing is the thing to do. If it's so easy to tell right from wrong, why do we ever choose to do the wrong thing (i.e., steal the candy bar or look at the test answers)?


### ***Right vs. Right Decisions***

A Scout had promised his parents he would be home by a certain time. On his way, he sees a person who has dropped groceries in a parking lot and is having a difficult time. If he helps her, he will get home late. If he ignores her and hurries home, he'll arrive on time but will not have helped a person in need. It's sometimes hard to know which decision to make when it is a **right vs. right** decision. If you had been that Scout, what would you have done? Why?

### **Checklist for Ethical Decision-making (15 min)**

Review the Checklist for Ethical Decision-making handout, which is in the Participant Notebook, and discuss the checklist with the group. Encourage them to consider how the various Yes/No questions can help them clarify choices and determine appropriate decisions.

Let's use this checklist to discuss a couple of scenarios. Each scenario has three points. For each point, once it is shared, participants should be encouraged to review the checklist and then asked by a show of hands whether they would or wouldn't report on the specific situation. The presenter should also ask for feedback after each point to support why they would or wouldn't.

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### Checklist for Ethical Decision-making

This checklist can be used to test choices when you are considering whether a decision is ethical. If you answer NO to any of the items, you may be heading in the wrong direction.

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Does it allow me to remain loyal to my values?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Does it allow me to lead myself and others correctly?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Does it conform to the Scout Oath and Scout Law?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Is it legal?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Does it conform to the Golden Rule?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Will this choice help me build trust with others?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Does it conform with my religious beliefs?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	Does it conform to the principles of the Outdoor Code?

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### ***Situation Dilemma #1***

- You are in a store and witness a man who you don't know shoplifting. Do you report it?
- A friend who knows the man shares that he is shoplifting to support his family since he is out of work. Do you report it?
- The store is owned by a close friend of your parents and recently has had quite a few issues with theft that is causing his business to suffer. Do you report it?

### ***Situation Dilemma #2***

- A friend confides in you that he cheated on a test, but you know that he has to work at night to help his family and is unable to study. If he fails, he will need to take summer school and will not be able to work as much. Do you report him?
- You find out that the test was graded on a curve and because he cheated, several of your classmates, who you don't know well, received lower scores than they deserve. Do you report him?
- Your score is now lower because he cheated, and now *you* will have to take summer school. Do you report him?

As with the discussions, the point of this exercise is not to judge some choices as being better than others, but rather for participants to gain experience applying the checklist and deciding for themselves if their choices were the best ones that could have been made.





## Summary (5 min)

Lead a reflection on ethical decision-making.

**Ask:** How will you use what they learned about ethical decision-making to change your actions in the future? What will you do differently today, tomorrow, this week, and this year?

Have them write down several ideas in the Participant Notebook.

Ethical decision-making is at the heart of Scouting America. It is also a true measure of each person's character. Who you are is the sum of your decisions. You can change who you are by changing your decisions.

Our personal values are reflected in our behaviors. Behavior is not, "Do I *think* the right thing?", but rather, "Do I *do* the right thing?"

I am sure that everyone here fully intends to only make the right decision. Yet we have seen, even within the very limited few examples we looked at, that no situation is always right and that even decisions that look trivial on the surface may have lifelong consequences. This means that, from time to time, each of us will make a bad decision. It is something that happens to us all.

What do you do then? It is often said that hindsight is always very clear! Use the power of hindsight to make your next decision the right one.

Remind participants to take a moment to ensure they have noted their top three takeaways in their Participant Notes for this session.