



Story General Information

Making Decisions (🧠 A Cognitive Health Story) (5th Grade – 10-11 yrs.)

Making decisions is something that all of us have to do all the time. Making good decisions actually helps you to live a better life and helps your brain stay healthy.

- Making good decisions is not easy, especially when the part of your brain that helps you make decisions is still growing.
- While your brain is still growing, you think about the world you live in differently and you may take more risks.
- Your brain does a lot of things for you and now is the time when you need to help your brain, so it can help you. Understanding how your brain works and how you are able to make decisions will help you to keep your brain healthy.

The facilitator begins by introducing themselves, neuroscience, and the program: Brain Health: It's SPECTacular. They explain the **C** in SPECTacular represents Cognitive Health. In this story, children discover the importance of good decision making, the tendency for *risky behavior*, and how the brain works during these processes.

The children and facilitator define exactly what the term *good decision* means. They also talk through a couple relevant situations the children might face: needing to prepare for a test but wanting to play video games and being dared to jump off a high swing. They discuss the choices and possible outcomes.

The facilitator reminds the children that their brain is still growing. The *prefrontal cortex* (decision-making part of the brain) is not fully developed until mid-late twenties; therefore, for children, teens, and young adults it can be difficult to make *good choices* sometimes. This is why these groups of people are more prone to *risky behavior*. The facilitator defines *risky behavior* and provides examples related to the scenarios discussed previously.

The children might be wondering why would anyone want to do something so risky it could hurt themselves? The facilitator elaborates on the need for risky behavior for survival needs. Cavemen had to learn through risks. They did not have books of information or people full of knowledge to guide them. It was trial and error or risky choices that kept them alive.

Fortunately, for generations people have developed the skills to read, write, and pass along important information and knowledge. This allows humans to eliminate many risky behaviors because other people have already learned the outcome. Yet, an under-developed brain does not always connect those cause and effects together. People also thrive on approval of others. When dared by a friend to jump from a high swing, a child may take that risk to impress their friend. The need for social acceptance can outweigh the physical risk they are taking.

Since the prefrontal cortex of young children is not fully developed, the facilitator guides the children through strategies to use when faced with a difficult decision. First, it is important to stop and think. Think about the outcomes of the possible choices. The best choice will be the one that protects their brain and body.

Risky behaviors can also threaten more than the physical well-being of a person. The facilitator addresses the risk taken when using the internet or social media. The children should be aware that sometimes it is easy to engage in more risky (social/emotional) behaviors when it is on a device or behind a screen and not in person. They should always be aware of who they are talking to and know their boundaries and limits to keep their brain healthy too.

People will always be faced with tough decisions. How someone handles those decisions contributes to their overall health and happiness. As the brain is growing and developing, equipping one's self with the necessary skills to avoid risky behaviors and make good choices is a significant step towards Cognitive Health and a SPECTacular brain!

Story Objectives:

- Students will define *good decisions* and give examples.
- Students will discuss different decision-making scenarios.
- Students will describe how good decision-making helps their brain.
- Students will explain why good decision-making can be difficult for children.
- Students will define *prefrontal cortex* and explain its function.
- Students will define *risky behaviors* and give examples.
- Students will describe why different people engage in risky behaviors.
- Students will describe one decision-making process when faced with risky behavior.
- Students will identify their personal goal is to protect their body and brain first and to help others in need.
- Students will explain how understanding the cause and effect relationship of decision-making improves their Cognitive Health.