



*Developed in collaboration with*



COLLABORATIVE FOR  
ACADEMIC, SOCIAL, AND  
EMOTIONAL LEARNING

# Responsible Decision-Making

## Competency

The educator will develop their abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.

## Key Method

The educator will develop and strengthen their ability to make responsible decisions by creating a plan that will include self-reflection, self-assessment, goal setting, and small action steps.

## Method Components

What is Social Emotional Learning (SEL)?

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL):

“SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.” ([CASEL, 2023](#))



CASEL's framework for SEL addresses five broad and interrelated areas of social and emotional competence:

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- **Responsible decision-making**

In this micro-credential you will explore aspects of **responsible decision-making**, reflect on how this competency is relevant to your work and personal life, and develop a plan for personal growth.

## What is Responsible Decision-Making?

Responsible decision-making is how we make positive and informed choices. This includes thinking about the consequences of our actions, being curious and open-minded to new perspectives and information, and identifying solutions that benefit us and the community ([CASEL, 2023](#)).

For a more in-depth look at responsible decision-making and how it impacts you personally and professionally, consider three major ways you likely rely on this competency: problem analysis; identifying solutions; and reflection on impact.

## Problem Analysis

Responsible decision making begins with analyzing a question or problem. This is the information-gathering stage, where a skilled decision-maker activates their curiosity and opens their mind to new knowledge, different viewpoints, and a critical examination of surface-level assumptions to better discover the root cause of a problem.

Educators make so many decisions in a day that many of us come to use unconscious mental shortcuts to cope with difficult decisions. These “decision traps” are hardwired so deeply into our thinking process that we often fail to recognize them. Being aware of these traps is the first step to avoiding them. Some of the most common traps are:

- **Anchoring**  
We tend to get stuck on first impressions. This means that we may get set on a decision based solely on initial impressions and fail to learn more and investigate an issue more deeply.
- **Maintaining the Status Quo**  
We may be uncomfortable challenging the “way things are”. It is easier to make decisions that won't upset the current balance of power, ways of thinking, and the policies and practices that we are accustomed to. This trap may hinder innovation that is necessary for improvement.
- **Sticking With a Bad Decision**  
Often we find it difficult to admit to a bad decision and acknowledge we



made a mistake. This trap takes away our ability to learn from our mistakes and adapt our plans accordingly.

- **Not Framing the Question Properly**

The way we frame a problem can affect how we approach a solution. Considering a range of perspectives and reframing the question in a variety of ways can help you make a more balanced decision.

Analyzing a problem requires a clear head, and it is important to recognize when we are not in the right state of mind to make a responsible decision. The H.A.L.T. method for decision-making reminds us to take a moment for self-awareness before a decision. H.A.L.T. stands for:

**H:** Your mind does not process as effectively when you are **hungry**.

**A:** Your mind is irrational and reactive when you are **angry**.

**L:** You are more vulnerable to poor decisions when you are **lonely** and aren't connected to a support network.

**T:** Being **tired** prevents you from thinking or working well.

Consider whether any of these factors are impacting you and take care of your needs before returning to a problem.

When you are ready to look at a problem with a fresh perspective, take some time to investigate. Talk to others who are impacted by the problem and ask open-ended questions to learn about their experience and ideas. Be sure to seek out people who are likely to see the problem differently than you and may be able to help you reframe the question or understand it more deeply.

Try the “5 Why’s” strategy to get to the root cause of a problem:

- ⇒ Why did the problem happen?
  - ⇒ Why did *that* (your response to the first question) happen?
    - ⇒ But why did *that* happen?
      - ⇒ And why did *that* happen?
        - ⇒ Still, why did *that* happen?

Each response to a “why” question gets you closer to the root cause of a problem. It may take more or less than 5 why’s to reach a cause that could be altered to prevent the problem in the future.

## Identifying Solutions

Once you have established a clear understanding of a question or problem, the next step is to identify possible solutions. This is often a good moment to work collaboratively with others who can help you think outside the box and generate multiple solutions.



Working with others, especially those who have been impacted by the problem and/or who are historically underrepresented in decision-making, offers you a better understanding of potential outcomes of each solution. A diverse group of advisors can help you foresee unintended consequences or obstacles to success.

For example, imagine you are considering your options to improve the rate at which students turn in homework assignments. Brainstorming and discussing solutions with colleagues, with your supervisor, with students, and even with a few friends who are not educators will produce more, varied solutions that you can then compare and experiment with. These conversations will also help you understand the way others are likely to view your decisions. Knowing ahead of time that a certain homework policy would put the teacher down the hall in a difficult situation, understanding the factors that make your students feel overwhelmed or supported, or hearing how your friend approaches deadlines in their workplace could give you the context you need to make the best choice.

Here are a few decision-making acronyms you may find useful:

### **S.O.D.A.S.**

**S**ituation - Identify the situation and determine who, what, when, where and why.

**O**ptions - Make a list of all the options you can think of.

**D**isadvantages - Determine the disadvantages for every option on the list.

**A**dvantages - Determine the advantages for every option on the list.

**S**olution - Review all the information to determine a solution and follow through.

### **P.O.O.C.H.**

**P**roblem - Identify the problem.

**O**ptions - Brainstorm options.

**O**utcomes - List all the possible outcomes—both pros and cons.

**C**hoose - Choose an option based on the information.

**H**ow did it go? - Evaluate the effectiveness of the decision.

### **Decision Tree**

Use a flowchart to examine the possible choices and their probable outcomes (see the resource section for templates and examples).

### Reflection on Impact

This stage of responsible decision-making should occur both before and after the decision is made and acted upon. We anticipate how our decisions are likely to



impact ourselves and others *and* follow up later as we observe the outcomes of our decisions.

The “responsible” part of decision-making is more than just taking a methodical approach. It is our responsibility to promote our own well-being, and the well-being of our family and community. When making decisions, we anticipate the potential personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional impacts, and use data (this can be numbers or qualitative information) to evaluate how it went.

As an example, let's return to the scenario where you are adjusting homework practices. After choosing an option, you track progress toward your goal (more homework turned in on time) by looking at the numbers. Are rates improving? But look a level deeper: what other impacts has your decision had? Are students producing high quality work? Are they doing better on assessments of their learning? How do they say they have been impacted by the changes you made? Have the changes impacted you in any unexpected ways?

You may find a flaw in your decision and decide to make a change. You may realize that you left out an important stakeholder group in your decision-making process and commit to including them in the future. Or, you might see great success, and share your experience with others, leading to a systems-wide change. Whatever the outcome, taking the time to reflect on your own and with others is key to helping you learn from experience and grow in this competence area over time.

## Supporting Rationale and Research

### Social Emotional Learning

[Bratton, V.K.](#), [Dodd, N.G.](#) and [Brown, F.W.](#) (2011), "The impact of emotional intelligence on the accuracy of self-awareness and leadership performance", [Leadership & Organization Development Journal](#), Vol. 32 No. 2, pp. 127-149. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01437731111112971>

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## Decision-Making Skills

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630. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S014829632030446X>

Collins, A. G., & Shenhav, A. (2022). Advances in modeling learning and decision-making in neuroscience. *Neuropsychopharmacology*, 47(1), 104-118. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41386-021-01126-y>

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# Resources

## General SEL Resources

[Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning](#)

- [What is the CASEL Framework? | CASEL](#)

[Leadership Competencies | NEA](#)

## Responsible Decision-Making

[Responsible Decision-Making | video from CASEL, Montgomery County ESC, and ThinkTVPBS](#)

[How SEL helps you as a teacher | Dr. Shivohn N. García | understood.org](#)

[1,500 Decisions a Day \(At Least!\): How Teachers Cope with a Dizzying Array of Questions | Alyson Klein | Edweek](#)

[6 Ways Teachers Can Ease Decision Fatigue | Nancy Barile | Hey Teach!](#)

[Decision-Making | Psychology Today](#)

[Decision Chain | Decision Education Foundation](#)

- [Decision Traps | video from Decision Education Foundation](#)

## Analyzing Problems and Solutions

[20 Free Decision Tree Templates | Word Templates Online](#)

[Decision Trees | Canva](#)

[Decision making Worksheet for Adults | Positive Psychology](#)

[What is a Decision Tree Diagram? | Lucidchart](#)

[Fishbone Generation Protocol: Unpack the Root Causes Contributing to a Problem | High Tech High Graduate School of Education](#)

[Expert Convening: Bring People with Diverse Perspectives Together to Inform Your Understanding of the Problem and Take Action | High Tech High Graduate School of Education](#)

[How Are You Feeling? Take a Minute to HALT for Your Health | Cyndi Turner | GoodTherapy.org](#)



## Reflecting on Impact

[Making Values-Informed Decisions | Arizona State University | via Greater Good in Education](#)

[Racial Equity Toolkit: An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity | racialequityalliance.org](#)

[Empathy Interviews: Learn About the Problem from a User's Perspective | High Tech High Graduate School of Education](#)

[Iterative and Critical Reflection on Teaching | Center for Teaching and Learning, University of Georgia](#)





# Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

*To earn the micro-credential, you must receive a passing score in Parts 1 and 3 and receive a proficient score for all components in Part 2.*

## Part 1. Overview Questions (Provides Context)

(200-300 words)

*Please answer the following contextual questions to help our assessor understand your current situation. Please do not include any information that will make you identifiable to your reviewers.*

1. How are you currently practicing responsible decision-making and what does that look like in your daily life?
2. How do you think strengthening decision-making skills will enhance your personal and professional life?
3. How do you model “not-knowing” and authentic curiosity to remain open to new information and solutions?

**Passing:** All questions are answered completely. Responses provide reasonable and accurate information that justifies the reason for choosing this micro-credential in order to address a specific need and explains current thoughts around open-mindedness, critical thinking, and thinking ahead about impact and consequences. Personal examples are included in the responses.



## Part 2. Work Examples/Artifacts/Evidence

To earn this micro-credential please submit the following three artifacts as evidence of your learning. *Please do not include any information that will make you or your students identifiable to your reviewers.*

### Artifact 1: Reflecting on Your Decision-making

Think about each statement and consider how easy or difficult each item is for you personally. **Do not turn this in.**

Responsible Decision-Making		Very difficult	Difficult	Easy	Very easy
PROBLEM ANALYSIS	I gather relevant information to explore the root causes of problems.				
	I recognize the need to continually grow, to examine the status quo, and to encourage new thinking in my school community.				
	I involve others who are impacted* to explore a problem collaboratively before choosing a solution or launching a new project.				
IDENTIFYING SOLUTIONS	I involve others who are impacted* to generate multiple solutions and predict the outcome of each solution to key problems.				
	I find practical and respectful ways to overcome difficulty, even when it comes to making decisions that may not be popular.				
	I consider how my choices will be viewed through the lens of the young people I serve and the community around them.				
REFLECTION ON IMPACT	I take time for self-reflection and group reflection on progress toward goals and the process used.				
	I consider how my personal and professional decisions impact the lives of others.				
	I help to make my personal and professional community a better place.				

\* such as staff and colleagues, young people, their families, and other community members – especially those who are historically underrepresented in decision-making.

Reproduced from CASEL's [Personal SEL Reflection](#) (2021), with permission.

(400-800 words)

Your responses to the items above are for you alone, but take some time to journal as you reflect on your responses.

1. Review the statements you marked as “easy” or “very easy.” How do these areas of strength affect your interactions with young people and peers?
2. Review the statements you marked as “difficult” or very difficult.” How might enhancing these areas of challenge benefit your interactions with young people and peers?
3. When looking at your responses, were there things that surprised you? Were there things that confirmed what you already know about yourself?
4. Provide 2 examples from your life that illustrate how responsible decision-making helped you manage a difficult situation and achieve a positive outcome for yourself and/or others.



5. Provide 1 example of how a lack of responsible decision-making has caused harm to yourself and/or others.

Upload your journal entry. This can be a photo of your written journal, a voice recording, or a digital document.

## **Artifact 2: Explore an Area of Personal Growth**

(700-1000 words)

Choose one situation that you are currently having a difficult time making a decision about. Use one of the tools from the resource section of this micro-credential to help you analyze the problem, generate solutions, and choose the best option. Use your journal to write about your process for making your decision. Include the following in your journal response:

- Describe the situation.
- What tool did you use and why did you choose it?
- What were some possible solutions you thought of?
- What were the likely consequences of each of these decisions?
- What was most important for you to consider in making this decision?
- What was your final decision? Explain why.
- What was the outcome of your decision? Was it the right decision? Why or why not?

**Upload the completed tool and your response to these questions.**

## **Artifact 3: Responsible Decision-making Growth Plan**

(200-400 words)

You can write in your journal or use a digital format to create a responsible-decision-making growth plan. In your journal, please:

1. Include one SMART Goal (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound).
2. Describe any anticipated challenges to reaching your goal.
3. Describe any supportive people you can rely on, or routines and structures you can put in place to help you achieve your goal.
4. List at least specific 3 steps you will take to get started.
5. Thoughtfully explain you will move forward and track your progress.

*\*SMART Goal example:*

*I will try 3 new tools for responsible decision-making in the next 30 days to evaluate the benefits and consequences of various actions, in order to make*



*caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions for personal and collective well-being.*

## Part 2. Rubric

	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Basic</b>	<b>Developing</b>
<b>Artifact 1: Reflecting on your Responsible Decision-Making</b>	<p>All questions are answered completely with a full explanation and examples</p> <p>Introspection is evident</p> <p>Journal is legible and/or understandable</p>	<p>All questions are answered but examples are missing</p> <p>and/or</p> <p>Introspection was not evident</p>	<p>Not all questions are answered</p> <p>and/or</p> <p>Details are missing</p> <p>and/or</p> <p>Introspection was not evident</p> <p>and/or</p> <p>Journal is not viewable or legible</p>
<b>Artifact 2: Explore an Area of Personal Growth</b>	<p>All parts of the activity are completed with important details.</p> <p>Information is authentic and thoughtful.</p> <p>Directions are followed and completed.</p> <p>An appropriate tool was matched to the type of decision that needed to be made.</p>	<p>Most parts of the activity are completed</p> <p>and/or</p> <p>Details are missing</p> <p>Information may lack authenticity or depth.</p> <p>and/or</p> <p>Some directions were not followed</p> <p>The tool for decision-making did not</p>	<p>Very few parts of the activity are complete</p> <p>and/or</p> <p>Details are missing</p> <p>and/or</p> <p>Directions were not followed</p> <p>No tool was used to make a decision.</p>



		match up to the type of solution needed.	
<b>Artifact 3: Responsible Decision- making Growth Plan</b>	Plan includes: -SMART Goal -A plan or tool to track progress -Answers to all questions  Answers illustrate a clear plan to accomplish the goal  Introspection is evident	The plan is missing parts  and/or  Answers lack details  and/or  No introspection is evident	Most parts of the plan are missing  and/or  Answers are incomplete  and/or  No introspection is evident

### Part 3 Reflection

(200-400 words)

Write a personal reflection about your work on this micro-credential. A strong reflection describes your personal experience working toward the micro-credential, specific moments that supported your learning, and examples of how you will apply what you have learned to your unique context. For tips on writing a good reflection, review the following resource:

[How Do I Write a Good Personal Reflection?](#)

*Please do not include any information that will make you identifiable to your reviewers.*

1. How did implementing your growth plan strengthen your decision-making?
2. What are your next steps in strengthening your decision-making?
3. What will you do differently, or what is working really well for you?

**Passing:** Reflection provides evidence that this activity has had a positive impact on decision-making. Specific examples are cited directly from personal or work-related experiences to support claims. Also included are specific actionable steps that demonstrate how new learning will be integrated into future practices.

