



This guide was produced by the Tennessee Behavior Supports Project at Vanderbilt University. This tip sheet was authored by Justine B. Katzenbach, Brooke C. Shuster, Becky H. Shafer, Blair P. Lloyd, and Erik W. Carter. For more information, visit <http://tennesseebsp.org>.



What are opportunities for choice-making?

Providing opportunities for choice-making is a proactive strategy implemented to prevent problem behavior from occurring. It consists of a teacher providing a student or group of students with opportunities to make choices during classroom activities.¹ It can be used as a motivational tool that may facilitate cooperation, prevent problem behavior, and increase engagement.²



Why are opportunities for choice-making important?

Making choices about classroom activities is a healthy way students can exercise control over their environment.³ This process also allows students to practice decision-making skills that can help them outside the classroom. Allowing students to make choices can increase shared ownership of the classroom and improve classroom climate. As student autonomy increases, challenging behavior may decrease as a result.

Many teachers worry that offering student choices may reduce their control of the classroom. Research indicates that offering a choice helps students to feel a greater sense of environmental control. In turn, this can lead to improved teacher-student relationships.⁴

When are opportunities for choice-making most effective?

Offering choice is a strategy that can be incorporated on a classwide or individual level. It is most effective when the teacher provides two equally favorable options (e.g., “Would you like to use blue or red paper?”) prior to problem behavior occurring.⁵ A common misconception is to offer choice with undesired options as a reprimand (e.g., “You can finish your work now or you can finish it in detention. You choose.”). In this example, the teacher is responding to inappropriate behavior. Offering student choices is preventative and should occur prior to problem behavior occurring.

How do I offer opportunities for choice-making?

Step	Offering Opportunities for Choice-Making ⁶
1	Make a list of choices that are reasonable in your classroom. If possible or appropriate, get feedback from students on choice options.
2	Identify opportunities in lessons to incorporate these choices.
3	Refer to your list of choices.
4	Write the choices directly into lesson plans.
5	Provide the choices as planned.



Examples of choice-making opportunities:

Choice-Making Opportunities ⁷		
Student(s) will choose the ...	Elementary Example	Secondary Example
Type of task/activity	<i>Writing a paragraph story about a fictional character or writing a paragraph about your favorite person</i>	<i>Writing an essay about a historical figure or creating a poster about his or her life</i>
Order of tasks	<i>Order of reading independently, working on sight words, and completing phonics worksheet</i>	<i>Order of different homework assignments in chemistry, history, math</i>
Materials	<i>Colored pencils vs. colored crayons</i>	<i>Typed responses vs. hand-written</i>
People with whom to work	<i>Partner, group, or teacher</i>	<i>Partner, group, or teacher</i>
When to complete the work	<i>During study hall, after school, or during recess</i>	<i>Complete homework during study hall or after school</i>
Location	<i>Working at desk, carpet, or table</i>	<i>Working at desk, table, library, or technology room</i>

Helpful tips for increasing choice-making opportunities in the classroom:

- If choosing partners or work groups, make sure to set clear expectations for students to ensure an inclusive classroom.
- Make sure all choice alternatives offered to students are acceptable. Avoid offering students choices between appropriate and inappropriate alternatives (e.g., “you can finish the worksheet or not finish it”).
- Some students may be overwhelmed by too many choices or it may take them too long to make a decision. Keep choices simple by planning them into your lesson prior to instruction. Then explicitly teach students appropriate expectations around making decisions.

Resources

http://pbissmissouri.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/1._Teacher_Tool_Activity_Sequencing_120114.pdf

Endnotes

¹Missouri SW-PBS Teacher Tool: Activity Sequencing and Choice (2014). Retrieved from http://pbissmissouri.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/1._Teacher_Tool_Activity_Sequencing_120114.pdf

²Katz, I. & Assor, A. (2006). When choice motivates and when it does

not. *Educational Psychology Review*, 19, 429-442.

³*Ibid.*

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Kern, L., & State, T. M. (2009). Incorporating choice and preferred activities into classwide instruction. *Beyond Behavior*, 18, 3-11.

⁷*Ibid.*



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