



DEAR ABBY: AN SEL KERNELS PRACTICE FOR THIRD GRADE

“Life is a matter of choices, and every choice you make makes you.”

-John C. Maxwell

OVERVIEW

Students imagine difficult situations and talk about strategies for making responsible, ethical, and healthy choices.

LEVELS

- Upper Elementary

PLANNING FOR IT

WHY DO THIS?

- If students imagine and talk about decision-making when faced with different kinds of dilemmas, then they will have strategies and ideas for what to do, so they are equipped to handle real-life situations.

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Integrated into your class schedule as part of a routine
- During a designated SEL block of 10-15 minutes per day for Kernels practice or as time allows
- When a dilemma arises in the classroom, in a book the class is reading, or as part of something being studied

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 15 minutes

MATERIALS

- [Dear Abby Library](#)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Imagine a difficult scenario and brainstorm how to respond
- Discuss the potential outcomes of different solutions to the problem
Reflect on what makes certain solutions better than others

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Ethical Decision-Making and Social Responsibility

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Think about a difficult situation that you are currently facing, or that you have heard or read about.
 - What are the possible ways that you, or the people in the situation, could respond? What would be the consequences, both positive and negative, of each solution?
 - What do you think would be the best course of action to take? Why?
 - What social-emotional skills did you draw on in coming to your decision?

Note: Click [here](#) to download and print a card version of this practice that can be added to the other [SEL Kernels practices](#) to make an easy-to-use hand-held collection. See the [Brain Games pack](#) for additional activities.

THE BIG IDEA

- We all have different ideas about how to solve problems, and that’s okay—there are many effective ways to solve a problem. We’re going to imagine situations, brainstorm what the options are, and identify what we like or don’t like about them. Talking about these choices will help us make decisions in the future when problems arise.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Choose a dilemma from the [Dear Abby Library](#).
- Choose one of these activities: Turn and Talk, Role-Play, Flip the Switch, Write a Letter, or create your own. (See “Activity Options” below for more information.)

- Say **The Big Idea** (above) and read the dilemma to the class.
- Follow these prompts to have a discussion:
 - Describe the dilemma and why it's a dilemma. Ask, "What makes this tricky?"
 - Brainstorm some options and their outcomes.
 - Ask, "What do you like and not like about these options? Why?"
 - Finish with a discussion of good solutions that have been brought up. Talk about why some options might be better for some than others.

MUST DO

- Ensure everyone has a chance to participate.
- Keep questions and conversations open-ended; there does not need to be a right answer.

CAN ADAPT

- Use stories from books, a dilemma that arises in the classroom, or other academic materials.

ACTIVITY OPTIONS

- Third grade is a time to build deeper understanding of the many choices that are possible in a given situation, and begin to think more flexibly about what is right/wrong (or comfortable/uncomfortable; healthy/unhealthy; responsible/irresponsible) about each. Listing pros and cons for each possible choice can help students consider the complexities of decision-making. Use graphic organizers to help students visualize many options.
- **Turn and Talk:** Ask students to pair up and discuss the dilemma with a partner. Ask them to either generate a couple of solutions or find one solution that they both agree on. Then, ask volunteers to share the solutions they discussed.
- **Role-Play:** Role play the different dilemmas with puppets or with another adult in the room. During the role play, have explicit conversations with children about the different choices the characters could make and what might happen as a result. Later in the year, ask for volunteers to lead the role plays.
- **Flip the Switch:** Tell students that you're going to play a game where they brainstorm many different solutions to the dilemma. First, ask them to share positive choices the character could make. Go around the circle and share, or ask them to participate "popcorn style." Then, when you call out "Flip the Switch!" have them share negative choices the character could make. Then lead a discussion to reflect on their suggestions.
- **Write a Letter/Draw a Picture:** Ask students to write a letter or draw a picture of a choice the character in the dilemma could make. Students can then share with the class, turn their work in to you, or keep them private.

AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF

- *Was it easy or hard for you to think about different choices the character could make? Why?*
- *Have you been in a similar situation before? What did you do? How did you feel about the choice you made?*
- *What's the difference between imagining choices for a character and facing a dilemma in real life?*

- *What advice would you give someone who's facing a dilemma?*
- *What are the different factors you considered when thinking about solutions?*

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Use pictures or role play to support emergent bilingual learners. Allow students who speak the same language to brainstorm together before sharing with the class.
- Consider whether the scenario you choose might be uncomfortable or difficult for any of the students. Talk with the student in advance or choose a different scenario.

SOURCE

This practice is part of the SEL Kernels project developed by the [EASEL Lab](#) at Harvard University.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Were students engaged in the scenario and the discussion around it?
- Were the students able to come up with and reflect on different possible solutions to the dilemma? Was the dilemma at the right level for them, i.e., not so obvious that little discussion was needed or too difficult for them to think about?
- Do you notice students pausing to consider options when making decisions in real life?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND IT

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Research shows that implementing [character education](#) programs in schools yields a number of positive results, including higher [academic achievement](#), [fewer suspensions](#) as well as dropouts, and [fewer risk behaviors](#) of students.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Character is considered [to encompass](#) understanding, caring about, and acting upon core ethical values such as respect, justice, citizenship, and responsibility for self and others. It also frequently includes the values and habits required to be [a good worker](#) and perform to one's highest potential, such as perseverance, diligence, and self-control.

More than simply holding prosocial ethical and performance values, displaying strong character requires taking the initiative to act upon those values and having the perseverance to follow through on them when faced with ethical, interpersonal, and personal challenges. In many ways, character can be understood as a complex construct that marshals underlying cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal skills to produce and guide ethical thoughts and behaviors.

TERMS OF USE

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Please email us at ggsceducation@berkeley.edu with any questions about our programs and resources for educators.

With gratitude,
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