



Teens and Decision Making The SODAS Model



The teen years are difficult for most families. The teens want to assert their independence while the parents want to retain their control and influence. In the teen years, students are most at risk of school failure, involvement with law enforcement, and dependence on social service agencies. The ability to make “good” choices is critical, yet too often this skill is assumed by parents, schools and other adults rather than taught as a necessary life skill.

The SODAS model for decision-making has been used across the country as a method of defining problems and applying a logical approach to resolving issues. SODAS is an acronym for Situation, Options, Disadvantages, Advantages, and Solutions. Using the steps in the SODAS model, teens are able to identify the real issues, weigh the pluses and minuses of several options, and come up with solutions that are grounded in reality rather than emotion.

Parents can help their teens by asking them to focus on the five W questions (who, what, where, when, and why) as they define the problem or issue. Your teen needs to look at the whole problem not just an emotional reaction to part of the issue. Your teen should be able to state clearly what the problem is before they can attempt to think of possible solutions.

To help your teen focus on options, have them make a list of possible options. Ask them to limit the list to 3 or 4 choices but don't offer options unless your teen is stuck. Ask them to think of reasonable and possible options. Try to refrain from value judgments at this point. Ask your child to evaluate the options for strengths and weaknesses. At this juncture ask your teen to write the advantages and disadvantages of each option. Specifically ask them what the possible outcomes or results will be for each option.

The last step is the hardest for both parent and teen. Choosing a solution requires thoughtful logical analysis. Allow your teen time to consider the work that they have done. If your teen chooses a solution with which you disagree, ask yourself if any harm will come from the decision. If not, let it go – your teen will learn from experience only if you allow them to make mistakes. In all cases, be supportive. Good decision-making is a skill acquired by trial and error and success and failure. You probably made mistakes growing up. Let your child grow and learn as you did.

