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3 Take wise decisions

We have to take various decisions on different occasions in life. Living can be defined as a series of decisions related to one another. This chapter attempts to guide you in taking effective decisions in face of various situations and challenges in life. Although decision taking appears to be a simple act it is in fact a complex mental process. In order to take effective decisions one should be endowed with a certain level of intelligence together with a wide range of experience and a broad vision. The decisions a person takes reflect his personal development and the outcome of those decisions influences not only himself but also his family, school and society. Hence, the aim of this chapter is to guide you to take correct decisions, give the strength necessary for it and through it to provide skills needed to achieve success in life.

3.1 The various challenges in life

The ideas expressed by a school boy, Ruvinda Bandara Abeysekara who came first in the island at the G.C.E. (A/L) examination in Arts Stream in a previous year were published in a newspaper in the form of an article. The following is an extract from this article. You too should read his ideas.

“I am Ruvinda Bandara Abeysekara. My mother, father and a younger sister are the members of my family. My father is a farmer. My mother is a housewife. I obtained Distinction passes in all the subjects at the G.C.E. (O/L) examination. All my teachers and friends advised me to choose the Science stream. From my early days I developed a liking for Law. I used to be the Leader of the School Debating Team. In school I participated in announcing assignments, arts activities as well as sports.

Although I started my Advanced Levels in the Science stream amidst everybody's blessings my preference was for the Arts stream. Ultimately after 6 months I took a decision to join the Arts stream since my capabilities as well as liking were for
Arts subjects. Since I engaged in my studies in the Arts stream with utmost enthusiasm I was able to face the A/L examination most successfully. After the examination I decided to work at a private sector establishment so as to ease my parents in their household burdens. While working there I decided to learn English in the evenings. I was jubilant on the day the A/L results were released. When I learnt that I was among the first ten pupils who scored highest marks in the island, I was overjoyed. Everyone congratulated me, blessed me and praised me. The firm that employed me promised me a permanent post offering me a good salary too. However I had to turn down their offer since I had by this time decided to enter the Law Faculty and engage in higher studies in that field. My determination is to be a good citizen in the future, making my parents who toiled hard on my behalf and my teachers happy. One final observation I can make is that taking the correct decision to suit the situation leads to success in life.”

What are your reactions after reading Ruvinda’s character sketch? Does it not show that the correct decisions he took as a pupil led to his success in life? You too may have to face similar situations in life. How should you take decisions in such a situation? What are the factors that influence right decision taking and how do you identify them? It is important to examine these matters.

In order to face the challenges and situations experienced in day to day life with determination, decisions have to be taken meaningfully and effectively. When we
have developed the skill of taking decisions, we will be able to identify the most effective method of acting in different situations. If, as school children, you develop the ability to take fruitful decisions when faced with life’s challenges and situations, it is possible to minimize conflicting situations. It will be possible to avoid regrets, differences of opinion and dejection. The food we take, garments we wear, fashions, mode of behaviour, people we associate with, use of media - all these depend on our skill in taking decisions. Therefore, we should train ourselves to take decisions with responsibility from our young days.

Taking correct effective decisions is a basic intellectual ability essential for success in life.

Psychologists who have done research on taking decisions say that even though certain people have advanced in age, they are still minors at the level of decision taking. It is clear from this observation that it is wrong to think that the skill of taking decisions develops with age. The individual should be given an education on decision taking.

3.2 The various decisions we take

We have to take various decisions on different occasions in day to day life. Life is a series of decisions. On certain occasions we have to take sudden decisions. If your friend, who accompanies you when returning from school has an accident, you will have to act promptly. In such situations you will have to decide for yourself, as to what should be done immediately. In certain problematic situations there can be instances where we cannot take prompt decisions. In such a situation we will be compelled to postpone taking a decision, let time decide or refrain from taking any decision. We take certain decisions on behalf of others. For example there are instances when you do not take any decision thinking that you might hurt the feelings of your most intimate friend or your parents. In such circumstances you may not take a decision out of consideration for others.

The decisions you take on every occasion should be beneficial to you, your parents, other members of the family, your school, as well as society. As school children you have to be more conscious of this. On various occasions we have heard of incidents when most decisions taken in school life subject to emotions have subsequently turned out to be the cause of regret in the long run. In certain situations
people have had resorted to arms without appealing to their intellect in taking decisions. We should necessarily shun such situations. As a pupil in Grade 9 you are reaching the early stages of adolescence. Being subjected to various changes physically and mentally, you should at this stage of growth look at life more intelligently and rationally. Observe the following chart which depicts the nature of decisions.

What should you do in situations when you cannot take a decision on your own? By now you too may have faced such situations. How did you act in such an instance?

- Did you solicit the advice of your elders, parents or teachers?
- Did you discuss it with your peers?
- Did you take a decision along with your friends?
- Did you keep silent without discussing the issue with anybody else?

Which is the most appropriate of the above courses of action? On certain occasions in life there are situations when you cannot take a decision alone. In such circumstances you can solicit the advice of your parents or experienced elders. You may give them the opportunity of taking decisions on your behalf. Both these actions not only help you in taking a correct decision, but also will be morally appropriate.
What is most important is to take the correct and effective decision at the right time. The decisions we take day by day can be grouped under three types.

(i) Routine decisions (motor habits) eg :- waking up in the morning, brushing teeth, washing face.

(ii) Emotional decisions - Decisions taken to express the sudden impulses that spring up in a person, eg :- When mother provides a meal which you do not like for your breakfast, you are annoyed with her and refuse it and go to school. Certain emotional decisions are morally sound and are necessary for social survival. Eg:- An instance of offering your seat in the bus to a disabled person. The impulsive decisions that are a part of emotional decisions are not at all conducive to survival.

(iii) Well considered decisions - These are the well thought out decisions

What is the subject I should choose as the aesthetic subject? Is it Art? Dancing or Music? Taking decisions by considering matters such as, in which of these subjects do I display some talent? Which subject do I like best?

Accordingly, as you understand what type of decisions we should take - Routine decisions? Emotional decisions? Well considered decisions?

Since routine decisions are taken automatically, they are not influenced by any reason. Emotional decisions are often taken when giving in to feelings. When emotions spring up in the mind, it is difficult to control one’s intellect. Sometimes it is only subsequently that we realize the results of such emotional decisions. When the emotion subsides the error in the decision is realized. Therefore, we should take well thought out decisions. Such decisions minimize regrets and also will bring about successful results. The results of some of the decisions we take can be reaped throughout our life. An example is the choice of a job and decision on marriage. Here we must take well thought out decisions.

Activity - I

Recollect the decisions you have taken so far in your life. What are the emotional decisions you took? What were their results? What do you feel about them today? How would the result have changed if you had taken well considered decisions? Think about these aspects.
3.3 Taking decisions under various challenging situations

In our life we face various challenges and situations. It is important to examine what a challenge is and how you should act when faced with a challenge in life. Challenges are obstacles and limitations that stand in the way of successfully achieving a certain objective, and we must be determined to overcome these challenges. For example, let us imagine a situation where during the recent Tsunami catastrophe, a child studying in Grade 9 lost his parents and the house in which they lived. What are the decisions this child who pursued his studies with much enthusiasm and desire could have taken after facing such a challenge? Think of the qualities he should develop in order to meet the above challenge. Imagine that, your pair of shoes are worn out and have become unusable. However, your parents do not have the money to buy you a new pair of shoes. All your class mates come to school in shoes. What is the decision you would take in such a situation?

★ Will you terminate your schooling?
★ Will you bother your parents and press them to buy you shoes?
★ Will you avoid food and spend the time in tears?
★ Will you be quarrelling in rage?
★ Will you think of the correct way of obtaining a pair of shoes?

When taking decisions we should be more concerned about the result of the decision taken. We must consider whether the decision taken will

- be harmful to you / your family / school or society
- be morally correct
- agree with the accepted norms of society
- be one that will not damage your pride and prestige.

When taking decisions you should pay attention to the following factors:

(i) avoid giving in to feelings.
(ii) think of correct and true aspects as much as possible.
(iii) be farsighted.
(iv) look at every aspect of the issue in a fair manner.
(v) think independently, uninfluenced by others.
(vi) be sensitive to others’ needs and feelings.
(vii) take decisions with responsibility.
3.4 The process of decision taking

The fundamental nature of a problem or a challenge is that a person is faced with an obstacle preventing the fulfilment of a need. In such circumstances the person faces an uncertain, complex as well as a problematic state. He is not clear as to what he should do. What the decision making process should facilitate is to identify the obstacle the person faces, identify the various courses of action or alternatives that should be followed to overcome it, and help in choosing the best out of the several alternatives. Decision taking process is basically guided by the person’s objective. Here the objective is determined by one's expectation, wish and will. Observe the following chart on the process of decision taking.

From this it is seen that decision taking is a process of arriving at a settlement between various problems and solutions. Prior to arriving at this settlement, the person who is to take a decision should have a clear idea of the problem. After understanding the problem, he must determine the various aspects, the desirable solution should have, and act accordingly.
Activity - II

Read the following incident:

Sumali is a pupil in Grade 9. She is the only child born to a very rich family. Apart from her parents Sumali’s grandfather too was living with them. Affectionately known as ‘Sudu Seeya’ he was very fond of Sumali. It was Sudu Seeya who narrated stories to Sumali and also took her out for walks in the paddy fields in the evening. Sumali’s grandfather died of old age. On the first anniversary of his death, the members of her family had arranged to offer food, clothes, books and stationery to the inmates of a children’s home. Sumali gladly prepared for it. However the annual educational excursion organized by the school too was planned for the same day. Now Sumali is facing a serious conflicting situation. On the one hand, it is the charitable activity organized on behalf of the grandfather whom she was very fond of. On the other hand, it is the educational excursion which she enjoys going on, in the company of her peers. Now she is faced with a serious problem.

Imagine that you are Sumali and answer the following questions.

1. What is the problem?
2. What should you do?
3. What can you do? What action can you take?
4. The advantages and disadvantages of these courses of action.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course of action</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
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5. What would be the best course of action?
A school boy wins the award for the best home garden

It is a school boy who won the award for the best home garden in a Home Garden Competition held in the Nikaweratiya Grama Niladhari Division in the North – Western Province. He is Ruwan Dissanayake and is the eldest child in his family. After his father’s sudden death of a heart – attack, his attempt to overcome the challenges of life, by taking up the burden of the family with his mother, taking to fruit and vegetable cultivation should be appreciated. His decision to bring up the family that had collapsed after his father’s demise has borne fruit today in a remarkable way. As the leader of the family, by engaging in his studies while at the same time maintaining the family with the advice of his teachers and elders, he has displayed immense strength and courage.

The above is a report about a courageous son who faced the challenges of life unperturbed. Isn’t the decision he took to revive the family that had nearly collapsed after the death of his father exemplary? Can you think how strong his will power was to assume the role of the head of the household and to continue with his studies in a balanced manner facing the challenges of life?

Such incidents provide good examples of taking correct decisions rationally in the midst of life’s situations and challenges. The decision taken by the child mentioned in the newspaper extract is a very appropriate and practical one. Thus it can be said that the correctness and the suitability of the decisions taken by an individual on different occasions, in order to achieve success in life, exert a vast influence on him.
Activity - III

Read the following extract from the novel “Vanagatha Lamo” (The Jungle Children) by Father W.A.L. Don Peter translated into English. (Edited as necessary)

“We went further into the jungle. We have been stranded in the thick jungle, without even a drop of water to drink. Although Ajith and I were frightened Thilak did not show any signs of fear. Since Thilak is a boy-scout and also the class monitor, he had always been the leader among us. The bright sunshine recedes gradually. Darkness will fall within two or three hours.

“Where are we going to stay tonight?” asked Ajith.

“We will have to stay on a tree” said Thilak.

“Oh! no! I cannot be on a tree in the dark at night…” Ajith expresses his fear.

“Ajith, whether you like it or not, we have no alternative but lodge in the jungle tonight” said Thilak.

“I agree with what you are suggesting. If I fall asleep and fall from the tree?” I asked.

“I’ll suggest a way out for that. Let us sit on the fork of the branches of the tree and tie pieces of sticks on either side. There are ample sticks and creepers in the jungle,” said Thilak.

Thilak made a few more suggestions too.

- Must go in search of water as soon as possible.
- We must use the water we have, sparingly.
- It is suitable to climb the tall trees and observe the surroundings.
- We must take turns to keep up in order to protect ourselves from wild animals.

(i) As mentioned in this story what is the situation these three children are faced with?
(ii) What are the challenges they have to face?
(iii) What are the leadership qualities Thilak displays?
(iv) If you are Thilak describe how you would face these challenges.
3.5 Towards success through correct decisions

We can quote from history with examples, instances where people who took correct decisions wisely in various spheres, became popular in the world. Thomas Alva Edison, who invented the electric bulb we use today and became world famous, carried out several experiments at inventing the electric bulb correctly. He has become a legend in world history on account of the decisions he took in order to reach the final stage of his invention, by correcting the error he committed every time he failed. If he had decided to give up his attempt when he failed in his experiments in the early stages, he would not have gained the honour of inventing the electric bulb. Hence, always think of failure as a basis of success. Failures have taught man lessons which he could never have learnt without failing. Thus the true seed of success exists within you. You need to decide to rise up again and again without being disappointed or discouraged by failures you experience.

Moreover, the decisions taken by leaders too are extremely important. It is because the decisions they take affect not only them but also their followers as well as the community and the entire country at large. Hence, when a leader takes decisions, he should take effective decisions with responsibility. Abraham Lincoln, a former President of the United States of America can be mentioned as a leader who took correct decisions.

Abraham Lincoln was a leader who carried on a revolutionary struggle for the liberation of the Blacks. Due to a very crucial decision he took in 1863, slavery was completely abolished confirming the right of every member of the Black community to live as a free individual. On examining Lincoln's childhood, although it appears a sad and difficult period, he was not distressed by his bitter experience. The farm belonging to Lincoln's father, who was a farmer was completely destroyed by floods, when Lincoln was small. Since then he lived in a log cabin in the state of Indiana and studied in a school 04 miles away, which he attended wearing only one dress made of deer hide. When he was 9 years old his mother died, and he went to work as a child labourer. While working as a labourer he noticed the torture and suffering undergone
by slaves and resolved that one day he would abolish slavery. Amidst all obstacles Lincoln did not neglect his studies and he was in the habit of reading books borrowed from others. Once a book he had borrowed got wet due to the rain. Lincoln kept this book in the sun to dry. However, when he took the book to its owner, the owner refused to accept it. Since Lincoln did not have the money to buy a new book, what he did to repay its cost was to tie bales of hay for the owner for three days. He had decided to work as a labourer in this manner because of his unquenched desire for reading.

Lincoln who took to several jobs once worked as a lawyer. One important principle he followed in the legal profession was not to appear for unjust cases. Even while serving as the President of America, he cleaned his own shoes. This amply reflected his unassuming ways. Abraham Lincoln’s name remains immortal in the annals of world history as an experienced President as well as a distinguished humanitarian and a true leader.

When speaking about taking decisions, we too had an unforgettable educationist. It was none other than Dr. C.W.W. Kannangara who is epitomised as “The Father of Free Education”. The crucial decisions he took on Free Education have left a lasting impression on the history of Sri Lanka. Among some important decisions he took are providing free education to children, introduction of the scholarship system to promote the capabilities of rural children, establishment of Central Colleges and the improvement of facilities for education. It was on account of his Free Education Ordinance that rural, low-income but clever children could attain the status of distinguished citizens of the country. The decisions he took some decades ago are relevant to this day.
Observe the above news extracts. These extracts indicate the challenges faced by young adolescents like you. A group of peers in school uniform found on the sea beach has been taken into police custody. Your school days are a unique period in your life. Once it lapses it will never be regained. Hence you should absorb all the wholesome experiences you can gather during your school days. It is because you have to lead your life properly on the correct path that you need the strength to take fruitful decisions. You should develop the strength and courage to do what you should do and refrain from doing what you should not do. This state is what education imparts to you and you should make it your inheritance. You should control the information and messages you get from your peers and from various media of communication. If your best friend suggests that you should stay away from school on a certain day and join him in an outing, you will have to take a decision as to what you should do. In such a situation, it is your responsibility to take an effective and correct decision. It is extremely important to know as to who should bear the responsibility for all your decisions and what their results are.

The second news extract mentions an experience of two maidens who went to act in a teledrama. You too should think how to act rationally in such situations. The media around us transmits different messages to us on various matters. Some such messages are wholesome messages that help you in your journey of life, while some are not so. We must take decisions rationally in order to choose suitable wholesome ideas and avoid unnecessary ones.
Activity IV

Read the following incident carefully.

Chamara, Sudhira and Sameera are Grade 9 pupils. All three of them are very close friends and stand out in studies too. They have also won the affection of their teachers. Two or three months ago Sameera came by a group of new friends who hang around the town frequently. After meeting these friends Sameera's manner of speech and dress too had changed slightly. Chamara and Sudhira came to know that his interest in studies too has declined. Even though Chamara and Sudhira explained matters to Sameera about his new clique of friends, he did not listen to them. On Wednesday of that week Sameera did not come to school. On the same day two police officers came to the school and discussed something with the Principal. What Chamara and Sudhira learnt later was that the two police officers had informed the Principal about Sameera's bad behaviour.

★ Complete the following table incorporating your ideas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The challenge faced by Sameera</th>
<th>How Sameera faced it?</th>
<th>Its results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On Sameera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On Sameera's family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On the school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

★ If you were Chamara or Sudhira what course of action can you take about your friend Sameera?

3.7 Creative ways of overcoming challenges

By now you have some idea of the importance of the decisions you take in life, the circumstances in which you are required to take decisions and the challenges you face. Looking at the situations in life and the related challenges more creatively will help you to arrive at meaningful decisions. Your capability is indicated when you refused to leave the school premises during school hours as suggested by your friend telling him about your decision without hurting his feelings.

Your decision should be taken correctly and in such a way that he too will be pleased about it and if possible, if you can convince him of the correct course of action, then you are truly clever. Hence you should get used to looking at situations in life and challenges in a broad perspective, from a different angle, creatively.
In taking decisions at times you can refuse straight away what you do not like or do not desire. On other occasions you might have to express your refusal to something in a creative manner, in different terms. Imagine that a group of your peers suggests that you join them to go to the beach after school without the permission of your parents. Then you could express your unwillingness straight away. Further, you could explain to the others the risk involved in engaging in such an act without the permission of parents and convince them of the advantages and disadvantages of such a decision. You could even go a step further and explain to them that this could be done on another holiday with the permission of the parents and also with the participation of parents. You should be able to provide a suitable solution appropriate to the situation.

There are no short-cuts to taking effective decisions. Resolve to face life faultlessly with perfection, using your intelligence and with the advice and experience of your teachers, parents and elders. Understand the importance of your life, develop your capabilities and skills and light your path in life through fruitful decisions. Then you will be able to become a useful and good citizen for the country.

**Activity - V**

Prepare a list of qualities we should develop in order to take correct decisions.

**Summary**

- In various situations in our life we have to take different decisions.
- There are certain matters that have to be considered in taking decisions. We have to be conscious of them and take meaningful decisions.
- Being aware of the process of taking decisions helps in reaching correct and effective decisions.
- Correct decisions help you achieve success.

**Assignment**

Prepare a collection of events/news(situations) indicating how various individuals took decisions on different occasions. Discuss in the class how effective those decisions are.