

What is Right for Me?

How to Make Important Decisions in Everyday Life

A Step-by-Step Approach

- T** — Think about problems, pressures, people, and priorities
- R** — Research facts and possible solutions
- I** — Identify options
- P** — Weigh the Pluses and
- M** — Minuses for each option
- A** — Action planning
- P** — Ponder the results of the decision

Use a **TRIP MAP** for decision making

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Mental Health Services

Shared Decision Making
in Mental Health





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Disclaimer

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This workbook is part of a set of materials designed to promote and support shared decision making in mental health. These materials include printed descriptive and informational materials, step-by-step decision making workbooks, videos and user guides, worksheets and tools, tip sheets, podcasts and archived webinars, and an interactive decision aid on using antipsychotic medications as part of a recovery plan.

All of these materials are available to download at no cost from <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/consumersurvivor>. Print copies, DVDs and CD-ROMs of the material are available from SAMHSA National Mental Health Information Center at 1-800-789-2647.

Notes

Resources

The material in the workbook is derived from many sources. We especially wish to acknowledge the inspiration provided by the Personal Decision Support Guides created by Ottawa Health Research Institute and available at <http://decisionaid.ohri.ca>.

You can use the links below to learn more about decision making skills and different ways to approach decisions. The views, policies, and opinions expressed on the featured web sites are those of the organizations maintaining the web site and/or the web site authors and do not necessarily reflect those of SAMHSA.

Robert Harris, Introduction to Decision Making
<http://www.virtualsalt.com/crebook5.htm>

eHow Careers & Work Editor, How to Make Decisions
http://www.ehow.com/how_3838_make-decisions.html

University of Florida, Making-Up Your Mind—Improving Your Decision Making Skills
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/HE691>

WebMD, Making Wise Health Decisions
<http://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides>

About This Workbook

Many decisions are ours alone to make. But we make our best decisions when we have good information, consider the input of others, and take time to think through what is most important to us.

This workbook is part of the Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) project on Shared Decision Making in Mental Health. This project provides tools to help people who use mental health services and people who provide services to have more collaborative and productive conversations about all aspects of a person’s mental health recovery plan.

Following the steps outlined in the workbook can help you make any important decision in your life, not just decisions about medical care or mental health treatment and services.

There are several ways you can use the workbook:

- As a tool to make an important personal decision on your own;
- As a guide for talking with someone else about your situation and options;
- As an aid for making a collaborative or shared decision together with others;
- As a way to prepare for meeting with a provider for planning or decision making about treatment and services.

Additional copies of this workbook, its companion helper workbook, worksheets, and other materials in SAMHSA’s Shared Decision Making in Mental Health series can be downloaded from: <http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/consumersurvivor>.

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Introduction

You make decisions every day about your life, relationships, health care, and services. Some decisions are easy to make, but others may feel difficult and stressful. These feelings are natural, but it is hard to make good decisions if the feelings become overwhelming.

You can reduce your stress and make better choices if you use steps to think through your situation and options. Remember that avoiding making a decision is a kind of decision itself – and it has consequences, too. Some complicated situations involve more than one decision. It is helpful to think about them one by one.

This workbook is designed to help you make a decision that you find difficult. It uses a simple tool called **TRIP MAP** to walk you through the steps of making a decision.

Here are the steps:

T
R
I
P

M
A
P

Think about the problems, pressures, people, and priorities

Research facts and possible solutions

Identify options

Weigh the Pluses and

Minuses for each option

Action planning

Ponder the results of the decision

Action Plan To

Step	What	Who	When	Completed
1.				☐
2.				☐
3.				☐
4.				☐
5.				☐
Resources:				



Plus-Minus Chart: *Weigh Your Options*

	Pluses (good things)	How Important?	Minuses (bad things)	How Important?
Option 1 Do nothing/ Make no change				
Option 2				
Option 3				
Option 4				

To help you see how the **TRIP MAP** process works, read Dori's Story in the blue box below. As you go through the workbook, you will see more blue boxes that show how Dori uses the **TRIP MAP** steps to help her make a decision about her situation.

Dori's Story

Dori just started working at a restaurant where her friend works, about a mile and a half from her home. She likes the job, but has to work late some nights. There is no night bus service, so she worries about her safety walking at night and dealing with bad weather.

Like a road map, this tool helps you at each turn, for example, by identifying your most important priorities or weighing the pluses and minuses of each option. You can use the **TRIP MAP** tool by yourself or with someone you trust.

You can write in the workbook, use the worksheet at the end, or use the **TRIP MAP** tool on a piece of blank paper. You can complete your **TRIP MAP** at one time, or, like many people, you can stop and pick it up again later.

You can do your best to get facts and information about your situation and options, but you may never have complete information about all the possibilities. You may feel uncertain or worry that you will make the wrong decision. The **TRIP MAP** tool helps you make the best decision you can with the information you have.

After you make a decision, you may want to share it with others. This workbook includes tips for how to do this, especially if others do not agree with your choice. If you find that your decision turns out not to be the right one for you, the workbook shows how to revisit and reconsider your choice.



TRIP MAP

Think

The first step is to stop and think about the situation. There are many things that will affect your decision. It helps to write down your thoughts about: the **problems**, **pressures**, **people**, and your **priorities**. Use the space provided or a blank sheet of paper.

◆ Problems

Most difficult decisions relate to some form of problem or challenge.

Before making a major decision, it is helpful for you to answer these questions:

- What is the problem or situation?
- What do you want to achieve?
- What do you want to stay the same? To change?
- Are you leaning toward an option now?
- Are you open to ideas?

◆ Pressures

Sometimes, you have to make a quick decision so you do not miss out on an opportunity. Other times, you have to act before a certain date.

In thinking about your decision, consider the following:

- What deadlines do you face?
- What are the consequences of not meeting these deadlines?
- Are there other reasons to make a decision by a certain time?
- Are you feeling pressured to choose a specific option? What concerns do you have about this?

TRIP MAP Decision Making Worksheet

Think	
Problems you want to address	Pressures such as deadlines or people who want you to do something
People who can help and who will be affected by the decision	Priorities for what is important to YOU in the decision

RESEARCH: What facts and information do you need? Where can you get it?

IDENTIFY YOUR OPTIONS by brainstorming. Include “make no change” as an option. Narrow your brainstorm list to what is practical and doable. Circle your three or four best options and then write them on the Plus-Minus Chart on the next page.

- Make no change/ do nothing
-
-
-
-
-

Talking about a Decision

Conversation Starters

- Do you have time to talk? I have some news I would like to share with you.
- I have been thinking about something for a long time. I would like to talk to you about it.
- You know I have been struggling with a difficult decision for some time. I would like to tell you what I decided.

Talking about a Decision

Dealing with Disagreement

- I know you hoped I would decide [mention their choice here]. Instead, I chose [insert your choice here]. I would like to tell you why.
- Your support is important to me. I would like to share with you a difficult decision I just made. It is important for me to tell you about it, even if you disagree with me.

TIPS

For Talking About the Decision

Often, you will need to tell others about the decision you made, particularly people who are affected by your decision.

Here are a few tips that can help you prepare to announce your decision to someone:

- Think about how people will react and address concerns you think they will have.
- Rehearse your announcement with a friend or someone else you trust.
- Pick a good time. Avoid talking about a big decision when you or others are busy, tired, hungry, or angry.
- Remember that people sometimes need time to accept news, and their initial reaction might change over time.
- Stress your priorities in positive terms. For example, "It's really important to me that I have more privacy, so I have decided to look for my own apartment."

Others may not like your decision or agree with it. It can be especially stressful if your decision goes against what is important to your family or community. You do not need to defend your decision, but it can be helpful to explain how you arrived at it. What is important is that you weighed your options and made a thoughtful, informed choice that is best for you.

There is no one best way to tell someone about a decision you have made. The key to success is to use the same thoughtful process you used in making the decision.

People

Most important decisions affect not just the person making the decision, but also friends, family members, and others.

In approaching a decision, you should consider:

- Is the decision completely up to you, or are others involved?
- How do you want to make use of others' opinions?
- Who can you talk to about your decision?
- How do you want to involve others in your decision? For example, as a helper, an advisor, a source of information or support, or as a partner for making a shared decision?

Priorities

What is most important to you in this decision? Your feelings will help guide you to make the decision that is right for you.

It is useful to rate which priorities are the most important to you in case you have to make tradeoffs.

- If there were a "perfect" choice, what would it look like?
- If you cannot have all the things you want, what would you give up and what would you keep?
- What are the two most important things on your list?
- What are the two least important things on your list?

T

Dori's People

Dori's mother wants to be involved, but Dori wants to make this decision herself. Her decision could affect other people, especially her boss and her friend. She thinks her brother might be a good resource.

Dori's Priorities

It is important to me that:

- I feel safe.
- I get to work on time.
- I don't get sick walking in bad weather.
- I save money for my own apartment.

Looking at her list, Dori feels that safety is the most important.



Research

Do you know the facts of your situation and what your options are?
Do you know the pluses and the minuses of each of these options?
If not, you need to get more information.

Dori's Research

Dori thinks getting a car might be an option, but she has never owned a car. Her brother knows a little about cars. A librarian shows her a book about the reliability of used cars and some Web sites offering used cars for sale. She talks to her friend about her ideas, too.

Here are some ways to get the information you need:

- **Visit a library.** There may be books and other resources to help you. Librarians can help you find useful information.
- **Use the Internet.** Visit Web sites you can trust. Look for Web sites that include reviews from others who have made similar decisions.
- **Talk to others.** Peers, family, friends, providers, spiritual advisors, and others may have useful information. Find people who have special knowledge about the topic you are researching. For example, if you are thinking about buying a used car, you may want to talk to a car mechanic about which ones have the fewest repairs.

Write down the information you need and where you will get it:

TIP

You can use the blank page at the end of this workbook to write down what you learn.



CONGRATULATIONS!

You have completed the **TRIP MAP** steps.

You have:

- Thought about your decision
- Researched and identified your options
- Weighed the pluses and minuses of your options
- Selected the best option for you, and
- Made an action plan.

The next section of this workbook contains resources you can copy and use as often as needed.

These are:

- Tips for Talking about the Decision
- Decision Making Worksheet
- Plus-Minus Chart
- Action Plan

P TRIP MAP

Dori's Decision

If Dori's friend decides to quit her job, Dori would no longer have a ride to work. Dori would need to revisit her options for getting to work and make another decision: walk, find another person to ride with, or buy a used car.

Or maybe Dori gets a raise at work, so buying a used car will not be so hard on her budget.

Ponder

How did your decision work out?

You made your decision with the best information you had at the time. But decision making is often an ongoing process, and circumstances can change. Sometimes your decision does not work out as you had hoped. In most cases, you can make another decision to try something else.

If things did not turn out as you expected, it does not mean that you have failed. This is often part of the process. We may revisit decisions many times as we learn new information or as our situation changes. Sometimes we make the same choice each time we revisit a decision, but other times we make a different choice.

If you need to make a new decision, you can use a clean copy of this workbook. There is a 3-page worksheet at the end of the workbook that can be photocopied to use every time you need help making a decision. You can also use the **TRIP MAP** steps with pen and paper.

TIP

We often learn something by looking at how our past decisions turned out—good and bad.

If you did not like how your decision turned out, at least you learned what you do not like. You can use this information to help you make different decisions in the future.

TIP

Cut out a wallet card from the back cover to help you remember the **TRIP MAP** steps.

I TRIP MAP

Identify Options

To make a good decision, identify as many options as possible. It helps to brainstorm—just write down all the ideas that come to mind, even those that are unusual or seem silly. While brainstorming, do not judge your ideas, just list them. Any idea is a good idea at this point. Talk to others. They may have ideas, too.

Brainstorm

List here as many options as you can think of.
Don't hold back or judge.

-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-

Narrow the List

After considering each brainstorm idea, circle the 3 or 4 ideas that seem most practical and doable. Write the circled ideas as your options in the Plus-Minus Chart on page 10.

Dori's Brainstorm

- Do nothing: keep walking
- Ask to work only when the bus runs
- Quit the new job
- Ride with friend
- Buy a used car
- Try to find an apartment closer to work

TIP

To narrow your options, ask:

- Do I have all the information I need about this option? If not, where can I learn more?
- Do I have the money or resources I need to make this work?
- Does this option depend on someone else?
- Does this option help achieve what is important to me?
- How would this option affect others who are important to me?
- Can I stick with this option?



TRIP MAP

Pluses and Minuses: Weigh the Options

You now have some practical and doable options. It is time to think about the pluses (good points) and minuses (bad points) of each one and write them on a Plus-Minus Chart. Filling out this chart may not give you the final answer, but it will help you think about your options and how you feel about them.

Some of the pluses and minuses will be more important to you than others. Your list of priorities from the “Think” step will help you weigh what matters most.

In the column labeled “How Important,” use stars to rate how important each plus and minus is to you.

- * One star means it matters very little.
- ** Two stars means it matters somewhat.
- *** Three stars means it matters a lot.

On the next page is Dori’s Plus-Minus Chart. The blank chart on page 10 is for you to use. There is another blank Plus-Minus Chart on page 18. You may photocopy these charts and use them as often as you like. You can also make your own Plus-Minus Chart on a blank piece of paper.

Dori Weighs Her Options

Dori realizes she has more options than quitting her job. She can continue to walk to work. She can buy a used car. She can ride to work with a friend.

She has written her options in the Plus-Minus Chart (page 9) and listed what she likes and does not like about each option. She used stars to rate how important these things are to her.

Option 4, riding with a friend, has more of what is important to Dori and less of what is not important to her. This process helps Dori see that riding to work with a friend may be her best option at this time.



Action Plan to:

Step	What	Who	When	Completed
1.				☐
2.				☐
3.				☐
4.				☐
5.				☐

Resources:

TIP

Keep your plan simple and doable. Write the action steps in the order they need to be done.



Action

Dori's Action Plan

Dori decided to ride to work with a friend and made this Action Plan. Notice that she has checked the steps that are complete.

Making a decision involves more than just choosing the best option. You must act on your decision if you want to make a specific change in your life. An action plan will help you follow through, especially if you identify what needs to be done, who does it, when it needs to be done, and resources you need to do it.

Here is Dori's Action Plan. On page 13 is one for you to use. There is another blank Action Plan on page 19.

Dori's Action Plan to: Ride to work with a friend				
Step	What	Who	When	Completed
1.	Talk to friend about the decision. Make sure it is still OK with friend.	Dori & friend	As soon as possible	☒
2.	Agree on Dori's share of gas.	Dori & friend	As soon as possible	☒
3.	Agree on a schedule and a start date.	Dori & friend	As soon as possible	☒
4.	Make a backup plan for times when friend cannot drive.	Dori	After agreements are made	☐
5.	Meet at agreed place and time.	Dori & friend	After agreements are made	☐
Resources: Home phone number or e-mail for friend; money to pay for gas; convenient place to meet; another way to get to work if friend is not available				

Dori's Plus-Minus Chart: Weigh Your Options

	Pluses (good things)	How Important?	Minuses (bad things)	How Important?
Option 1 No change: Continue to walk	No cost	***	Takes a long time	*
	Get exercise	*	Weather gets bad	***
			Does not feel safe	***
Option 2 Quit job	Opportunity to find something better	*	Lose income and job I like	***
Option 3 Buy used car	Reliable	**	Expensive to buy	***
	Saves time	***	Costs of gas, insurance	***
	Feels safer	***	Could break down	**
Option 4 Ride with friend	Feels safer	***	Do not like feeling dependent on friend	**
	Inexpensive	***	May not be reliable	**
	Saves time	*	Friend's car is old and could break down	*
	Friendly conversation	**	Mother does not like friend	*

Steps

1. Write your best options on a blank Plus-Minus Chart.
2. List the pluses and minuses of each. List as many as you can think of. Use another sheet if you need more space.
3. Record how important each plus and minus is to you. One star (*) means that a pro or con matters very little to you. Two stars (**) means it matters somewhat. Three stars (***) means it matters a lot to you.



Plus-Minus Chart: *Weigh Your Options*

	Pluses (good things)	How Important?	Minuses (bad things)	How Important?
Option 1 Do nothing/ Make no change				
Option 2				
Option 3				
Option 4				

Are you leaning toward one option? If so, which one? Write it here:

Choose your best option

What does the completed table reveal? Does one option seem to fit your goals and priorities? If you are leaning toward one option over others, but not ready to decide, what else do you need to make your decision?

Still not sure?

Did the decision making table help you select your best option?

If you are still having trouble deciding, here are some ideas that might help:

1. **Review why you are making this decision.** Look at how you defined the problem in the “Think” step (page 4). Choose the option that best helps you meet your goal.
2. **Think about what is important to you.** Look at your list of priorities from the “Think” step (page 5) and choose the option that helps you get what is most important to you.
3. **Consider tradeoffs.** Are you willing to give up something that is important to you to get something even more important?
4. **Do you need more information?** You might need to do more research.
5. **Get more ideas.** Maybe there is an option you did not consider. Review your brainstorm list in the “Identify Options” step (page 7). Talk with others—they may have fresh ideas or another way of thinking about your options.
6. **Make a “backup” plan.** If you are worried about your preferred option not working out, it can be helpful to think about what you would do. For example, if it does not work out riding with a friend, Dori could still walk.

When you are comfortable that you have made the best choice for you, write your decision here:

I have decided:



TIP

Not deciding is a decision itself and has pluses and minuses like other options. If you feel stuck, get help or support from others.

TIP

Test your decision

- Talk about it with others. Explain your decision to someone you trust. Talk about what you saw as options and how you arrived at your decision. Others may offer support or have useful suggestions.
- Try it on. Ask “What is the worst that could happen if I choose this option? Is this likely to happen? Am I okay if it does?” If you are okay with the possible outcomes of your decision, it is a good one for you. If not, you may want to identify more options and weigh their pluses and minuses in another decision chart.