LIVING SKILLS

Personal Growth

MAKING DECISIONS

FACILITATOR GUIDE



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CONTENTS

Introduction	to the Living Skills Program	1
An Overview	v of Making Decisions	3
Scope and Sc	equence	5
SESSION 1.	Introduction to Making Decisions	7
SESSION 2.	What's Your Decision-Making Style?	
	Handout 1: How Do I Make Decisions?	15
SESSION 3.	Decision-Making Steps	17
	Handout 2: Decision-Making Steps	21
SESSION 4.	Learning from Your Decisions	23
Recommende	ed Resources	27
Living Skills	s: Group Facilitator Session Record	28

SPEAKING POINTS: Whenever you see this icon in this guide, it means that the corresponding bolded text is meant to be spoken aloud to participants.

HANDOUTS: Whenever you see this icon in this guide, there is a copy of the handout at the end of the session.

The number on the icon corresponds to the handout number.



INTRODUCTION TO THE LIVING SKILLS PROGRAM

What Is the Living Skills Program?

The Living Skills program is designed to provide basic education and application of key living skills that all people need to live healthy lives. Personal growth skills focus on those internal skills that shape how one responds to the world, such as values and responsibilities, decision making, etc. Practical guidance skills focus on those external skills that help people live fulfilling lives, such as education, money management, etc. For many participants, this may be the first time they have ever learned these living skills.

Using best practices in the field, the exercises, discussions, and role plays in the Living Skills program address the underlying emotional, behavioral, and cognitive barriers that might otherwise prevent continued progress toward a healthy and fulfilling life.

What Are the Components of the Program?

Facilitator Guides

The information and exercises in the facilitator guides introduce topics to learners who may be unfamiliar with basic living skills. The exercises help learners begin to apply the concepts to their lives. The guides are designed to be used in conjunction with the corresponding workbooks and videos in the Living Skills program. The read-aloud sections, role plays, and other exercises with group discussions found in these guides are designed to be conducted in a group setting, but could be adapted for individual use.

Videos

The videos are meant to complement the facilitator guides and include interviews with subject matter experts, offering practical information to motivate viewers to change their behaviors. By teaching knowledge and demonstrating skills, these videos help learners begin to see how acquiring these skills can change their lives.

Workbooks

The exercises and information found in the workbooks help individual participants revisit what they learned during the facilitated sessions, while also diving deeper to apply the concepts to their own lives. The learners complete the workbook on their own, either in session or as take-home work.

What Topics Are Covered in This Program?

The *Personal Growth* component of Living Skills covers the internal skills needed to be a positive and productive member of a community. Topics include Values and Responsibilities, Interpersonal Skills, Refusal Skills, Making Decisions, Setting and Attaining Goals, and Parenting and Child Development.

The *Practical Guidance* component of Living Skills provides information on the day-to-day external skills needed to live a healthy life. Topics include Hygiene and Self-Care, Sexual Health, Managing Money, Education, Looking for Work, and Securing Housing.

Each topic includes a four-session facilitator guide with reproducible handouts, a workbook, and four videos (one for each session) that provide more in-depth information and show each skill in action.

Who Is the Intended Audience?

The Living Skills program is designed for use with a wide variety of audiences, including but not limited to adults in recovery, correctional settings, or mental health settings. This program provides tools to help participants live healthy, fulfilling lives.

How Could These Resources Be Used in a Group Setting?

For each topic, the facilitator can use the facilitator guide and video for delivery of material with the workbook to be completed at home. The facilitator guide, handouts from the facilitator guide, and participant workbook are downloadable from the online subscription page.

A group setting helps participants become more comfortable with the dynamics of group interaction, while also providing opportunities for peer support.

How Could These Resources Be Used in an Individual Setting?

For each topic, the facilitator can use the facilitator guide and video for one-on-one delivery of material with the workbook to be completed at home. If there is time, the facilitator could talk through the participant's responses in the workbook at the next individual session. Each facilitator guide contains the handouts for that topic, and participant workbooks are downloadable from the online subscription page.



AN OVERVIEW OF MAKING DECISIONS

What Are the Key Topics Covered in Making Decisions?

The ability to make wise decisions and carry through with them is essential in developing a healthy life. Like any other acquired skill, making wise decisions becomes easier with practice. This topic is divided into four sessions:

SESSION 1 introduces the idea that making decisions is a skill, discusses why it is an important skill, and identifies the consequences of poor decision making.

SESSION 2 identifies decision-making styles, discusses the negative consequences of unbalanced decision-making styles, and discusses healthy decision-making styles.

SESSION 3 introduces the steps in making decisions, discusses the importance of following through on decisions, and explores possible solutions to personal decisions.

SESSION 4 examines how to learn from decisions and discusses taking enough time, consulting others for feedback, and trusting oneself as keys to wise decision making.

Why Is the Skill of Making Decisions So Important?

Many of the decisions people make have a significant impact on their lives. Poor or unhealthy decisions can have long-term consequences in every area of people's lives, including financial, families and children, physical health, and work. However, many people do not know how to approach making decisions.

There are specific skills to be learned in considering options and making decisions. When people understand this process, they are likely to have more confidence in themselves and be more thoughtful about the decisions they make, generally resulting in better decision making.



SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

SESSIONS	LEARNER OUTCOMES	
Session 1. Introduction to Making Decisions	 Define what decision making is. Identify some reasons why the skill of decision making is important. Identify some of the consequences of poor decision making. 	
Session 2. What's Your Decision-Making Style?	 Identify their decision-making style. Identify the negative consequences of an unbalanced decision-making style. Explain the characteristics of a balanced decision-making style. 	
Session 3. Decision-Making Steps	 Identify the steps in making decisions. Apply those steps to hypothetical situations. Apply those steps to a real-life, personal situation. 	
Session 4. Learning from Your Decisions	 Describe how to reflect on and learn from past decisions. Identify three tips to help with decision making. Apply these tips in a real-life, personal situation. 	



SESSION 1. Introduction to Making Decisions

Goal

The goal of this session is to introduce the idea that making decisions is a skill, discuss why it is an important skill, and identify the consequences of poor decision making.

Learner Outcomes

- Define what decision making is.
- Identify some reasons why the skill of decision making is important.
- Identify some of the consequences of poor decision making.

Time Needed

50 minutes

Materials Needed

- whiteboard or flipchart paper
- dry-erase markers
- Making Decisions session 1 video segment
- · computer monitor or some way to display the video segment

Preparation Needed

Preview the video segment so you are familiar with the information that is covered.

SESSION OUTLINE

Getting Started (7 minutes)



- 1. Introduce the session by saying: All day long we make decisions—what to eat for breakfast, what clothes to wear, or what to do with our time. These are small decisions, but all of us have to make big decisions too—what kind of work we want to do, whether to get married, have a child, or move to a new place. Making decisions is not always easy. At one time or another, we have all struggled with decision making.
 - Learning how to make good decisions is important. It is a skill you will use every day. The challenge is that in many situations there is often more than one right choice. If the decision is about getting a new job, there may be several right choices. What is important is making a choice that is positive for your life.
- 2. Ask participants to think about a decision they have made recently. It could be a small decision or a big decision. Ask participants, if they are willing, to briefly share what that decision was.
- 3. Explain to participants that they will now watch a short video and you will discuss the video afterward.

Playing the Video (3 minutes)

Make sure everyone can see and hear the Making Decisions session 1 video segment. Stay in the room while the video segment is being played.

Discussing the Video (17 minutes)

- 1. Lead a discussion about the video segment. Ask group members the following questions:
 - Why is it important to make wise decisions?
 - What are some of the negative consequences of making poor decisions?
 - Do you ever feel making decisions is overwhelming? Scary?
 - Why does it matter if you learn how to make wise decisions?

NOTE: Highlight that they can learn how to make wise decisions.

Going Deeper (20 minutes)

1. Read the following story to the participants:

Juan has learned of a job he thinks would be perfect for him. It would be more money so he could finally repay the loan he got from his friend. The only problem is that the job is forty-five minutes away from where he lives, and there is no public transportation. If he wants the job, he has to buy a car. Juan sees a car online for \$1,500 that is old and in pretty rough shape, but it's something he can actually afford. Juan goes to see it. The odometer says 86,000 miles, but the owner says the odometer just broke last week.

The owner wants cash, and he says it's going to go fast. He tells Juan there is no time to take it to a mechanic to have it checked out. Juan really likes the car, and 86,000 miles seems pretty good. Besides, he needs a car quickly if he's going to apply for that job. He decides to draw \$1,500 out of his bank account and buy the car that afternoon.

The next day he takes the car to get the title transferred and realizes the state requires proof of insurance before registering the title. When he makes calls about insurance, he discovers it will cost him way more than he thought it would. To make matters worse, the car breaks down one week later while he is stuck in traffic.

- 2. Explain: This obviously was not a wise decision on Juan's part.

 Ask participants to list the negative consequences of Juan's decision.

 (Possible answers: loss of \$1,500; inability to apply for a better job; inability to repay the loan to his friend; responsibility for a car that is not working.)
- 3. Ask: What were the challenges Juan faced in making this decision?

 (Possible answers: knowing whether the car was in good condition; finding out if the price was reasonable; learning about other costs involved in owning a car, such as insurance; the owner was rushing his decision.)
- 4. Explain: We make many different types of decisions in our lives—small, big, short-term, or long-term. (Define what short-term and long-term mean, if needed.) Our decisions affect different parts of our lives.







- 5. Ask participants to brainstorm the different parts of their lives where they make important decisions. Make columns on a whiteboard or flipchart paper, headed by the brainstormed categories. These might include Personal, Relationship, School, Work, or Other.
- 6. Ask participants to share decisions they made in the last week, both big and small, and list them under the appropriate category.

NOTE: If you have a large group, you may want to do this activity in small groups.

Wrapping It Up (3 minutes)



1. Explain: **We have all made wise decisions in our lives.** Ask participants to share one wise decision with the group.



2. Explain: Our goal is to help you learn how to continue to make wise decisions. Ask each person to think about a personal goal he or she would like to have while learning to make wise decisions.

(Possible answers: take enough time to check out all choices; make decisions based on reality, not wishful thinking; trust self.)

CHALLENGE

Challenge participants to interview one or two people who they think make wise decisions and ask those people how they do it.



SESSION 2. What's Your Decision-Making Style?

Goal

The goal of this session is to identify decision-making styles, discuss the negative consequences of unbalanced decision-making styles, and discuss healthy decision-making styles.

Learner Outcomes

- Identify their decision-making style.
- Identify the negative consequences of an unbalanced decision-making style.
- Explain the characteristics of a balanced decision-making style.

Time Needed

50 minutes

Materials Needed

- whiteboard or flipchart paper
- dry-erase markers
- Making Decisions session 2 video segment
- computer monitor or some way to display the video segment
- How Do I Make Decisions? handout, found on page 15 of this guide
- · pencils or pens

Preparation Needed

- Preview the video segment so you are familiar with the information that is covered.
- Photocopy the How Do I Make Decisions? handout (one copy per participant).

SESSION OUTLINE

Getting Started (7 minutes)

- 1. Review the basics of making decisions:
 - We all have to make decisions—constantly; it is part of being alive.
 - There are many kinds of decisions, including personal, work, school, and relationships.
 - Learning how to make decisions is important.
 - All decisions have consequences, and poor decisions can have negative consequences.
 - You can learn how to make wise decisions.



- 2. Tell participants that people usually have their own decision-making style. Give each participant a copy of the How Do I Make Decisions? handout and a pen or pencil. Ask them to take the quiz to help them think about what their style is, but don't have them score their quiz yet. You will do this after watching the video. To complete the quiz, instruct participants to place a check mark next to the statements that apply to them as they finish the sentence, "When faced with making a decision, I usually . . . "
- 3. Explain to participants that they will now watch a short video and you will discuss the video afterward.

Playing the Video (6 minutes)

Make sure everyone can see and hear the Making Decisions session 2 video segment. Stay in the room while the video segment is being played.

Discussing the Video (14 minutes)

- 1. Lead a discussion about the video segment. Ask group members the following questions:
 - Can you name and describe the decision-making styles reviewed in the video?
 - Who could you relate to the most in the video, in terms of decisionmaking style?



2. Explain: There are pros and cons to each decision-making style. Let's first look at some of the cons or problems with each decision-making style.



- Go with Your Gut: Sometimes when you "go with your gut" you might have a tendency to jump at the first choice that comes into your mind. You may not take time to think through a decision; you just do it.
- Think It Through: Thinking things through is a really good idea, but sometimes people with this style can agonize endlessly over a particular decision and second-guess themselves.
- Take Your Time: Taking your time to make a decision is also a good idea, but sometimes people with this style can get in the trap of procrastinating and not making a decision at all. They put it off and off and off, maybe because they can't make up their mind or maybe because they just don't want to think about it.
- Poll Other People: It's always a good idea to talk with others before
 making a decision, but sometimes people with this style may depend
 on someone else to make the decision for them or they may make the
 decision to please someone else.

Going Deeper (20 minutes)

- 1. Ask participants to score their How Do I Make Decisions? handout and share the results, if they are comfortable doing so.
- 2. Ask: Can you see how your decision-making style has affected how you make decisions and the resulting consequences? Ask for volunteers to share some of the consequences of their decision-making style, both good and not so good.



NOTE: Emphasize that it is important to consider the effects of our decisions on others as well as on ourselves. Some examples of such consequences are being able to provide a better life for your child, not being able to pay child support, hurting a friend's feelings, repairing a relationship, or getting hurt so you can no longer hold a job or provide for your family.



3. Tell participants: Although there are weaknesses in each decision-making style, there are also strengths. You can use strengths from each style to have a more balanced decision-making style. The strengths of each decision-making style include:



STYLE	STRENGTH
Go with Your Gut	taking your feelings or gut reaction into account
Think It Through	considering all the options
Take Your Time	waiting long enough to evaluate all of the options
Poll Other People	taking the opinions of others and considering the impact on others

Wrapping It Up (3 minutes)



- 1. Explain: We can all have a more balanced decision-making style. Ask: For example, what could a person with a Take Your Time style do to have a more balanced style?
 - (Possible answers: set a time limit on when they will make a decision; ask a friend or significant other to hold them accountable to make a decision; take action in small steps, such as writing down their options, thinking about the consequences of those options, and not getting stuck in overanalyzing so they can't make a decision.)
- 2. Brainstorm with the group what people can do to turn the weaknesses of each style into strengths and become more balanced. Write down their ideas on a whiteboard or flipchart paper.

CHALLENGE

Challenge participants to identify specific actions they can take to become more balanced decision makers, then to practice those actions.

HANDOUT 1: HOW DO I MAKE DECISIONS?

Complete the sentence below by placing a check mark next to the statements that apply to you.

When	faced	with making a decision, I usually	
	i	Choose the first thing that comes to mind.	
	_ p	Wait to decide until I absolutely have to.	
	d	Ask my friends what they think.	
	w	Have trouble sleeping at night because of the big decision.	
	_ p	Turn on the television or play a video game.	
	w	Analyze the situation and all my options.	
	d	Let my husband/wife/girlfriend/boyfriend decide for me.	
	i	Choose whatever feels good.	
	w	Panic.	
	d	Think about what my friend would do.	
	p	Sleep on it.	
	w	Get stuck and don't make a decision.	
	_ i	Hurry up and get it over with.	
	w	List every pro and con I can think of, and then do it again.	
	d	Think about how every person who matters to me will like or not like my decision.	
	p	Make sure I feel the decision is the right one, even if it takes a long, long time.	
	_ i	Don't think much—just go with my gut.	
your and h dete your fill i ma each	nd out score elp you rmine style, n how ny of letter hecked.	Number of i's checked = Go with Your Gut Number of w's checked = Think It Through Number of p's checked = Take Your Time Number of d's checked = Poll Other People	



SESSION 3. Decision-Making Steps

Goal

The goal of this session is to introduce the steps in making decisions, discuss the importance of following through on decisions, and explore possible solutions to personal decisions.

Learner Outcomes

- Identify the steps in making decisions.
- Apply those steps to hypothetical situations.
- Apply those steps to a real-life, personal situation.

Time Needed

50 minutes

Materials Needed

- whiteboard or flipchart paper
- dry-erase markers
- Making Decisions session 3 video segment
- · computer monitor or some way to display the video segment
- Decision-Making Steps handout, found on page 21 of this guide
- pens or pencils

Preparation Needed

- 1. Preview the video segment so you are familiar with the information that is covered.
- 2. Photocopy the Decision-Making Steps handout (one copy per small group of up to four people).

SESSION OUTLINE

Getting Started (7 minutes)

- 1. Review the decision-making styles:
- 9
- We all have a natural decision-making style.
- These styles include "Go with Your Gut," "Think It Through," "Take Your Time," and "Poll Other People."
- When you are extreme in the use of one style, it can have negative consequences.
- You need to be balanced in your style, using strengths from each style.
- 2. Ask participants if they can think of a person who they feel is a wise decision maker. This could be someone they know or someone they have heard about, even a famous person. Ask what that person does that makes participants believe he or she is a wise decision maker.
- 3. Tell participants that they will now watch a short video, and you will discuss the video afterward.

Playing the Video (7 minutes)

Make sure everyone can see and hear the Making Decisions session 3 video segment. Stay in the room while the video segment is being played.

Discussing the Video (3 minutes)

Lead a discussion about the video segment. Ask group members the following questions:



- Can you name the steps in the decision-making process?
- What comments did people in the video make that you felt were helpful?

Going Deeper (30 minutes)

- 1. Review the decision-making steps:
- Identify the decision that needs to be made. Determine if it is in your control. Is this something about which you can actually make a decision?
- · Clearly define the decision.

- Identify your options. This might mean doing some research by reading and talking to people.
- List the pros and cons of each option. Think about the pros and cons for yourself and for the other people in your life.
- Rank the pros and cons according to how important they are.
 Then weigh the pros against the cons.
- · Make the decision.
- Take action.
- 2. Lead a discussion on the different steps, asking the following questions:
 - What is an example of a decision that would be out of your control?



- How could you go about researching options?
- What kinds of questions might you ask?
- When you are considering the pros and cons, whom might you consider besides yourself?
- 3. Ask participants: **Have you used any, or even all, of these steps in the past?** If some of them say yes, ask if they are willing to share an example of a time when they have used the steps.



- **NOTE:** Assure them that sharing aloud is voluntary but remind them that it is helpful when people share because we all have a lot to learn from each other.
- 4. Ask participants to break into small groups of up to four people. Give each group a copy of the Decision-Making Steps handout and a pen or pencil. Have each group identify a recorder who will fill out the handout and a reporter who will share the group's discussion with the larger group.



- 5. Ask if a member of each small group would volunteer to share a significant decision he or she needs to make that is in his or her control to make. Then ask the group to use the decision-making steps to come up with a possible solution. As the group discusses the steps, the recorder should fill out the handout. Give each group about ten minutes to do this activity.
- 6. Have everyone come back to the larger group and have each small group reporter tell the larger group what their group's decision was, what they decided together, and each step in their process.



- 7. Ask the following questions about the process:
 - · Did you find it difficult or easy to come up with options?
 - Did people have different opinions when you were rating the pros and cons?
 - Did it feel as if the process could be useful for you?

Wrapping It Up (3 minutes)



- 1. Say to the group: Once you've made the decision, taking action seems like it should be the easy part. You just add up the points and then do it. But it's not that simple. Taking action can be just as hard as making the decision. We often make decisions but don't follow through on them. This is especially true when it's a difficult decision. But making a decision is only worthwhile if you take action on it. For example, it doesn't do much good to decide you're going to quit smoking if you immediately tell yourself, That was a hard decision, but I'm glad I made it. I'll quit soon. And then you light up a cigarette.
 - There are lots of reasons people have for not taking action on a decision. They get distracted. A friend calls and invites them to do something. They feel stressed and tell themselves they need to take a break and watch some television. They don't know how to get started, so they feel overwhelmed and just don't do anything about it.
- 2. Ask participants to talk about what steps they might take to act on each of the decisions reported by the small groups. List the action steps on a whiteboard or flipchart paper.

CHALLENGE

Challenge participants to think about one important decision they need to make and use the decision-making process to help them make that decision. Also challenge them to share their process and decision with their significant other or friend.

HANDOUT 2: **DECISION-MAKING STEPS**

1.	1. What is the decision you need to make? Determine if the decision is in your control		
	Answer:		
2.	Write out a cle	ear definition of the decision.	
	Answer:		
_			
3.	_	r options? This might mean doing o people. Write them in the box be	
	OPTIONS	PROS	CONS
	Option 1		
	Option 2		

Option 3

HANDOUT 2: DECISION-MAKING STEPS (CONTINUED)

4. What are the pros and cons of each option? For you? For others?	
	Write them in the box on the previous page.
5.	Rank the pros and cons. Circle the pros and cons that are most important.
	Then weigh the pros against the cons.
6.	What is your decision? Write it below.
	Answer:
7.	What is one action step you can take now to follow through on that decision?
	Answer:



SESSION 4. Learning from Your Decisions

Goal

The goal of this session is to examine how to learn from decisions and discuss taking enough time, consulting others for feedback, and trusting oneself as keys to wise decision making.

Learner Outcomes

- Describe how to reflect on and learn from past decisions.
- Identify three tips to help with decision making.
- Apply these tips in a real-life, personal situation.

Time Needed

50 minutes

Materials Needed

- whiteboard or flipchart paper
- dry-erase markers
- Making Decisions session 4 video segment
- · computer monitor or some way to display the video segment
- paper
- pens or pencils

Preparation Needed

Preview the video segment so you are familiar with the information that is covered.

SESSION OUTLINE

Getting Started (7 minutes)

1. Review the decision-making steps:



- Identify the decision that needs to be made. Determine if it is in your control. Is this something about which you can actually make a decision?
- Clearly define the decision.
- Identify your options. This might mean doing some research by reading and talking to people.
- List the pros and cons of each option. Think about the pros and cons for yourself and for the other people in your life.
- Rank the pros and cons according to how important they are.
 Then weigh the pros against the cons.
- Make the decision.
- · Take action.
- 2. Ask participants to briefly share an example if they've used any of the steps since the last session. Ask them to share what their decision was, the steps they used to make that decision, and finally the action they took.
 - **NOTE:** Assure them that sharing aloud is voluntary but remind them that it is helpful when people share because we all have a lot to learn from each other.
- 3. Tell participants that they will now watch a short video, and you will discuss the video afterward.

Playing the Video (6 minutes)

Make sure everyone can see and hear the Making Decisions session 4 video segment. Stay in the room while the video segment is being played.

Discussing the Video (14 minutes)

Lead a discussion on the video segment, asking the following:



 Why would anyone want to spend time thinking about a decision that he or she has already made?

- Can you learn things from wise decisions you've made or only from poor decisions?
- Can you name three tips to help you make wise decisions that you learned in the video?

NOTE: The answer is to check your gut feelings, get advice from someone you trust, and sleep on it if you have time.

Going Deeper (20 minutes)

- 1. Ask participants, if they are willing, to share their answers to the following questions:
 - Have you ever made a poor decision by ignoring your gut feeling?
 How did that turn out?



- Have you ever let someone else make a decision for you?
 What was the outcome?
- Have you made a poor decision based on the advice of others?
- Have you ever made a poor decision because you didn't consult someone when you should have?
- Have you made a good decision after having consulted others a decision you wouldn't have made if you hadn't asked for help?

NOTE: Emphasize that people need to balance input from their feelings and from their thinking. It's important to use our brains as well as our hearts. Also, people need to balance input from trusted others. Once participants have made a well-thought-out, reasonable decision, encourage them to stand by their choice—even if it means facing opposition from others who disagree with the decision.

2. Give each participant a piece of paper and a pen or pencil. Explain: Let's take all you have learned about making decisions and share it with others. Pretend you are "Dear Abby" and someone has just written you a letter asking you to help that person make an important decision. You can decide what that decision is. Write this person a letter explaining how he or she should go about making that decision, based on all the skills you have learned. Letters don't need to be more than a couple of paragraphs.



3. If participants need help coming up with a decision, suggest one that is relevant to your group. When participants have finished their "Dear Abby" letters, ask them to read them aloud for the group. If there are a lot of participants, or if you have minimal time left, ask them to break into pairs and read their letters to each other.

Wrapping It Up (3 minutes)

1. Ask participants to review the decision-making steps.



2. Ask participants: Is there one step you are particularly good at? Is there one step you forget to do? Identify one thing you can do to improve.

CHALLENGE

Challenge participants to take the one improvement they identified and start putting it into practice.



RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Resources Available through Hazelden Publishing (800-328-9000, hazelden.org/bookstore)

Finding Your Moral Compass: Transformative Principles to Guide You in Recovery and Life

Craig Nakken (Order No. 7459, E-book Order No. EB7459)

Craig Nakken, author of the best-selling book *The Addictive Personality*, gives readers in recovery the model and tools needed to make life decisions in the pursuit of good. He offers forty-one universally accepted principles, paired as positive and negative counterparts, that guide behavior.



LIVING SKILLS: GROUP FACILITATOR SESSION RECORD

Making Decisions Sessions		Date
SESSION 1.	Introduction to Making Decisions	
SESSION 2.	What's Your Decision-Making Style?	
SESSION 3.	Decision-Making Steps	
SESSION 4.	Learning from Your Decisions	