

## Taking the Pain Out of Decision Making



By  
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Difficulty with decision making is a problem often cited by women who come to my office. Two issues have to be addressed when helping someone with decision making. The first issue is the strong influence of emotion. The second issue is values clarification. I will address both of these issues.

Fear, guilt, and anger are strong emotions that influence our decision making. The experience of these emotions is often so uncomfortable that our decision making is easily influenced by wanting to calm these feelings. Unfortunately, when we base our decisions on these emotional pulls, we often make impulsive and irrational decisions. We just want the bad feeling to go away, so we “give in” to the decision that will quiet these feelings. For instance, we say “yes” to a child or to a spouse to keep the peace when we know we really should say “no.” But, by saying “yes,” the immediate sense of guilt or fear goes away. Learn to identify these emotions in the decision-making process and experiment with making

the decisions you know are the more rational or mature ones, even if they may be the more difficult ones in the moment.

The issue of values clarification is also critically important to decision making. When you know your core values, decision making is easier. For instance, if I have a strong core value of authenticity, then making difficult decisions can be easier if I keep this in mind and make decisions that are most consistent with this value. If my core value is honesty, then I must be honest with myself and others in the decisions that I make. By making decisions based on my core values, I will feel more of a sense of integrity with myself even if my decisions are difficult. I often give

my patients a values clarification exercise to help them with this.

Decision making does not have to be painful. Having a strategy in place can make the process much easier to bear.

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