

Making Choices Activity

How will you invest your resources?

This activity is a great way to explain the tough choices low-income families are forced to make every day.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Make copies of the “game sheet.” Participants can work in teams of 2 or 3.
- Provide each group with 15 candies (Smarties work well because there are 15 in each roll).
- Tell each participant or team their candies will become symbolic of their “budget” and not to eat their candies until the end of the game!
- Explain that for the purposes of the game each person or team is to pretend they’re married with 2 children.
- One adult in the household is working full-time and the other is working two part-time jobs. Both make minimum wage.
- The family has a limited budget and only 15 candies to spend.
- They have some tough decisions to make.
- Each participant must study their choices in each row and invest their candies with 1, 2 or 3 candies depending on what’s most important to them.
- They cannot skip a row.
- After they’re done making their choices, ask the group how it felt to invest their candies. (Usually the response is, “There weren’t enough candies!”)

UNEXPECTED EXPENSE OCCURS:

- Now tell them there’s been a change. One of their children has a strep throat and has to see the doctor. The family doesn’t have health insurance. In order to get the child the health care the family must give up 2 candies.
- Tell the group to take off 2 candies and adjust the rest as needed.
- Tell them there’s been another change. Their spouse just got laid off with no severance pay. They have to take off 4 candies to adjust.
- Let them go through the exercise of taking off the 4 candies and adjusting the rest.
- After they are done making these choices, ask the group about the choices they had to make and the struggle of making them; also how that felt.
- For continued discussion: ask participants what other things could happen that would force choices; what reactions did they have to this exercise.

Today, many of our family, friends and neighbors are forced to make these tough decisions every day, right here in Yellowstone County. For these hard-working families the basic ingredients for a good life are increasingly beyond their reach. It is shown that these struggles in families affect people’s health, the ability to find and keep employment and the ability of children to do well in school and graduate.

Making Choices



How will you invest your resources?

If you had a “15-candy budget” to spend every month how would you spend it? What would your priorities be? Place the required number of candies to indicate your spending choices. You have to make a choice for each category (you can’t skip any categories). You are married; you both work and have a son, 14 and a daughter, 9.

CANDY BANK



Category	A (1 Candy)	B (2 Candies)	C (3 Candies)
Housing	Studio apartment (1 bedroom), 1 bath, unfurnished, no patio/deck/yard, street parking only (no covered parking space), stove only	3 bedroom, 1 bath apartment, unfurnished, covered patio, 1 covered parking space, stove and refrigerator	2 bedroom, 1 1/2 bath house, unfurnished, small fenced yard, 2-car garage, stove, refrigerator and dishwasher
Healthcare	No health insurance, you pay for all health related costs	Health insurance for you through your employer but no health insurance for your family members	Health insurance for you and your family through your employer
Food (per person)	1 meal a day	2 meals a day	3 meals a day + snacks
Transportation	Walk or bike everywhere, no public transit available	Walk, bike or take public transit	Own your own car
Technology Access	No computer No cell phone Black and white TV – no cable	No computer Cell phone TV – no cable	Home computer Cell phone TV with cable
Laundry Facilities	Laundromat	Shared laundry room in apartment complex	Own washer/dryer, in your home
Shopping	1 grocery store within walking distance, no mall within 20 miles	Grocery store across the street from your home and a mini-mall within a mile	2 grocery stores nearby and a large mall within walking distance
Spending Money	After the bills/food are paid no extra money left	\$20 left over each week after all bills are paid	\$50 left over each week after all bills are paid