

The Decision-Making Map

THINKING PATTERNS AND WORRY · DECISION-MAKING WORKSHEET

A step-by-step route through a decision when your mind keeps circling

Some decisions feel impossible to settle. We go over the options, wait to feel sure, and ask others again and again, yet the uncertainty stays. This map breaks a decision into eight smaller stops, so you can move forward with information that is good enough, rather than waiting for certainty that may not come.

01 When deciding feels stuck

common patterns

Overthinking

Going over the same options many times, hoping more thought will make the answer clear.

Indecision

Putting the choice off, so it is sometimes made by default or by time running out.

Needing certainty

Waiting to feel completely sure before acting, even when certainty is not available.

Fear of the wrong choice

Focusing on what could go wrong, so that every option starts to feel risky.

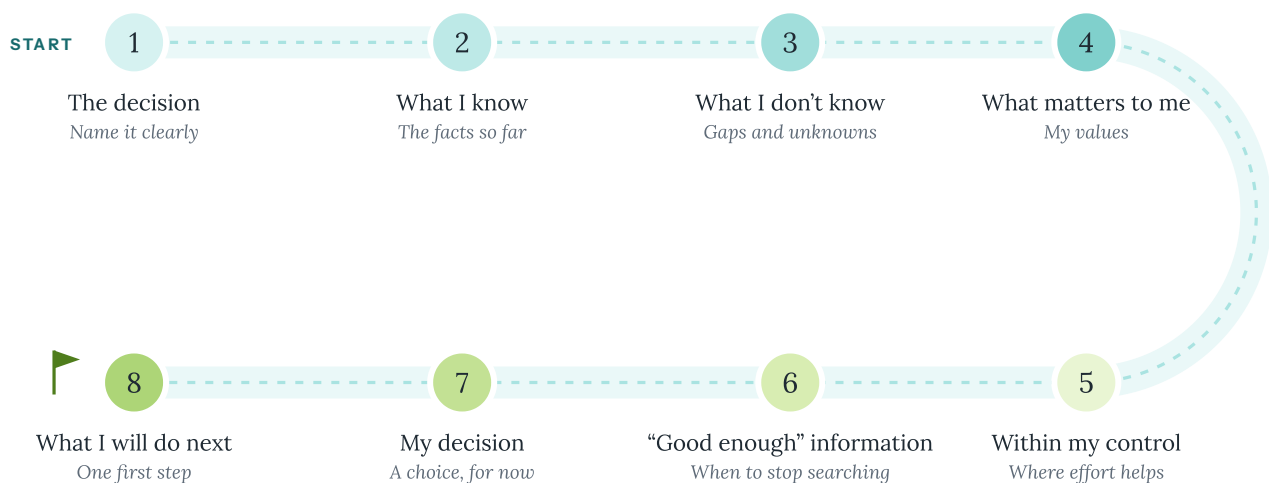
Asking again and again

Seeking others' views repeatedly. Relief may come, but the doubt often returns.

These patterns are common and understandable. They often aim to avoid mistakes, yet they can keep us stuck for longer.

02 The map

eight stops, one at a time



Original diagram. You can move back and forth between stops; the order is a guide, not a rule.

03 Asking others for help

advice and reassurance

Seeking advice can help

Talking a decision through with someone you trust can add useful perspective, information and support. Asking for input is often a sensible part of deciding.

The pattern to notice

Asking the same question repeatedly, mainly to feel certain or to have someone else decide. Relief tends to be short-lived, and the need to ask may grow.

What the research suggests

EVIDENCE NOTE

- Finding uncertainty hard to tolerate has been closely linked with worry (Freeston et al., 1994).
- Excessive reassurance seeking has been linked with anxiety and obsessive-compulsive symptoms, and in one clinical study it reduced over a course of CBT (Rector et al., 2019).
- People who tend to search for the very best option reported, on average, more regret and less satisfaction than those who settle for "good enough" (Schwartz et al., 2002). These findings are correlational, and later research is mixed.
- Looking back over many years, people often regret things they did not do more than things they did (Gilovich & Medvec, 1995), a pattern partly supported in a recent replication (Richardson & Gilovich, 2023).

These findings can guide reflection, but they cannot predict how any single decision will turn out.

The Decision-Making Map

DECISION-MAKING WORKSHEET · STOPS 1 TO 4

Getting clear on the decision and what you already know

Work through the stops at your own pace. Short notes are fine, and you can leave a stop and come back to it. There are no right or wrong answers here.

04 Mapping my decision

stops 1 to 4

1 The decision *name it as simply as you can*

The decision I am facing: _____

I need to decide by: _____ The main options are: _____

How important does this feel? ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 0 = minor · 10 = very

How reversible is it? ☐ Easily reversible ☐ Partly reversible ☐ Hard to reverse

Many decisions turn out to be more adjustable than they first feel.

2 What I know *facts, rather than predictions*

3 What I don't know *and whether it matters*

Something I don't know	Can I find out?	Would it change my choice?
	☐ Yes ☐ Partly ☐ No	☐ Likely ☐ Maybe ☐ Unlikely
	☐ Yes ☐ Partly ☐ No	☐ Likely ☐ Maybe ☐ Unlikely
	☐ Yes ☐ Partly ☐ No	☐ Likely ☐ Maybe ☐ Unlikely

Some unknowns cannot be answered before deciding. Noticing this can help you stop searching.

4 What matters to me *tick any that feel important here*

☐ Security ☐ Health ☐ Connection ☐ Family ☐ Growth ☐ Freedom ☐ Honesty ☐ Fairness ☐ Creativity
☐ Rest ☐ Adventure ☐ Contribution ☐ Other: _____

Which option fits best with what matters to me, and why? _____

A kinder outside view

If a friend I care about were facing this decision, knowing what I know now, what might I say to them?

i For decisions involving your safety, health, legal or financial matters, it is wise to seek appropriate professional advice alongside this map. If a decision relates to feeling unsafe in a relationship or at home, please speak with your psychologist or a support service.

The Decision-Making Map

DECISION-MAKING WORKSHEET · STOPS 5 TO 8

Deciding with good-enough information, then taking a first step

You do not need to feel completely sure to make a reasonable decision. The aim of these stops is a choice that fits what matters to you, made with the information that is realistically available.

05 Mapping my decision

stops 5 to 8

5 What is within my control *where my effort can make a difference*

Within my control

Outside my control, which I can let be

6 What is “good enough” information? *tick any that are true*

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ I understand the main options | ☐ Waiting longer has its own costs |
| ☐ I know the most important facts | ☐ I have considered what matters to me |
| ☐ More information is unlikely to change my choice much | ☐ I have asked for input once, if helpful |

For this decision, “good enough” means: _____

My time limit for gathering more information: _____

7 My decision *a choice for now, based on what I know*

For now, I choose: _____

How sure do I feel? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 0 = not at all · 10 = completely

Some uncertainty is a normal part of most decisions. Feeling unsure does not mean the choice is wrong.

8 What I will do next *one small, specific first step*

My first step: _____ When: _____

If doubts come back, I will: _____

Instead of asking for reassurance again, I could: _____

06 Looking back

Worry about this decision: before the map 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 after 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What did I notice about how I usually decide?

To bring to my next session

GO AT YOUR OWN PACE

Working through a difficult decision can bring up emotions. You can pause, stop, choose a different stop, or return to the map later. If you become significantly distressed, consider speaking with your psychologist or another appropriate professional.

SOURCES

Freeston, M. H., Rhéaume, J., Letarte, H., Dugas, M. J., & Ladouceur, R. (1994). Why do people worry? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 17(6), 791–802. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-8869\(94\)90048-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-8869(94)90048-5)

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Schwartz, B., Ward, A., Monterosso, J., Lyubomirsky, S., White, K., & Lehman, D. R. (2002). Maximizing versus satisficing: Happiness is a matter of choice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(5), 1178–1197. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.83.5.1178>