



Field Practice Resource: Decision-Making Model: Probability Versus Consequence

The Probability Versus Consequence Model teaches students to evaluate the risk of their decisions according to the likelihood that a negative outcome will result compared to the severity of that consequence. (This activity was adapted from NOLS.)

Why this matters

Using this model will help students build confidence in their decision-making skills or take further consideration to manage the impact of their decisions.

CASEL Competency Supported: Responsible Decision-Making

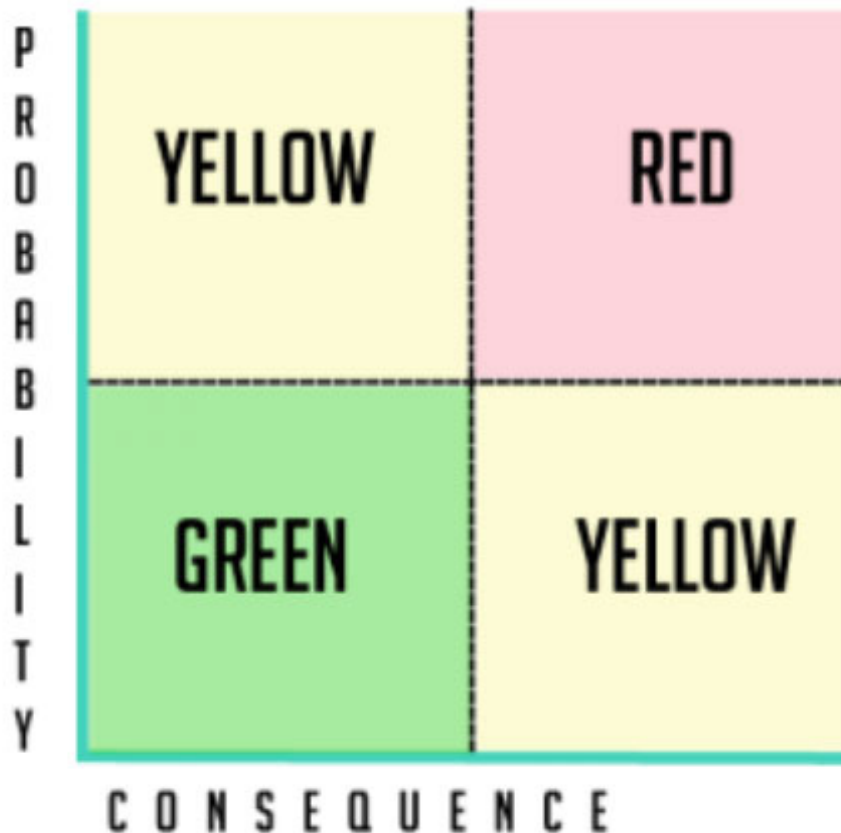
Responsible decision-making is the ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others.

Getting started

This activity requires the ability to illustrate the model, either on a whiteboard or even better, by using a large model on the ground where students can walk through their decision-making process. Gather a long rope, plus one red, two yellow, and one green “marker”; cones, buckets, and hoodies all work well. The activity takes about 15 minutes.

How to do the activity

1. Outline the model on the ground using the rope and markers:



2. Explain to students that the X-axis represents an increase in severity of the consequence, while the Y-axis represents an increase in the likelihood that a negative outcome will occur. This model is best understood when students apply it to situations they will face in the real world. Ask students to think of examples related to activities they will take part in during their stay—everyone at a Residential Environmental Learning Center (RELC) will eat in the dining hall, spend the night, and take part in learning sessions. For the most part, these activities have low probability of negative outcomes and low consequence if something does happen. This means that they are in the “green zone,” and students can feel confident proceeding.

3. Students may come up with scenarios such as choking in the dining hall. This is a great example of low probability, but potentially high consequence. This situation puts them squarely in the “yellow zone,” and students should proceed with caution. Ask students to brainstorm ways they could avoid this particular situation.

4. Ask students to consider low-severity consequences that are more likely to happen. Students may think of situations such as getting mosquito bites because they did not wear long sleeves at dusk. Keep students thinking about concrete steps they can take to avoid negative consequences. The “yellow zone” does not indicate that we cannot proceed, only that we need to take action to mitigate the potential risk of our decisions.

5. Students may have already suggested “red zone” activities. Clearly, if there is a high probability of a high consequence, we should not proceed unless we can decrease the probability or consequence. For example, climbing on a high ropes course element, there is a high probability of falling with a severe impact. We can mitigate this risk by requiring participants to wear properly fitting harnesses and helmets, placing the activity back into the “green zone.”

6. Students often consider physical consequences of their actions first. Challenge students to apply this model to their emotional safety. Split students into smaller groups and ask them to consider situations that could threaten others’ emotional safety. Which actions would cause someone to land in each zone of the model? Have they witnessed any of these actions during their program? What can we do as a team to minimize the emotional risk to members of our group? Have a discussion about what was effective or ineffective through a fictitious scenario that is light-hearted and even humorous.

Extensions or further resources

See NOLS’ [Likelihood & Consequence Model here](#).