

Making Choices: How will you invest your resources?

Source: United Way of New Haven, <http://uwgnh.org/post/making-choices-activity>

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!”)

Possible game options:

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.

How UW programs can help this family:

- Ask participants for ideas of how this family can use UW resources to help?
- If anyone says call 2-1-1, give them 1 candy. Then ask for other participants to name referral services from 2-1-1. For each referral service, like child health care, energy

assistance, crisis intervention, counseling, legal assistance or suicide prevention, give that participant or team 2 candies.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY:

Today, many of our family, friends and neighbors are forced to make these tough decisions every day, right here in Southwestern Indiana.

For many millions of hard-working families, the basic ingredients for a good life are increasingly beyond their reach.

Want to make a difference? Help create opportunities for everyone in your community. United Way is creating real, lasting change where you live, by focusing on the building blocks of a better life – education, income and health. That’s what it means to LIVE UNITED! For more, visit www.unitedwayswi.org

Thank you for creating opportunities and inspiring hope for a better tomorrow.

Now let everyone eat their candies!