

Episode 54 Teaching kids to make better decisions

This is episode 54, let's get started.

Smarter Parenting welcomes you to our podcast series, The Parenting Coach for ADHD. Here to help elevate lives is your [Parenting Coach](#), Siopé Kinikini.

Hello, hello, hello my friends. My friends how are you? I hope everyone is doing great. I am doing fantastic actually. Everything is going really well and there's just so much to share with Smarter Parenting and things that are happening here. So, giving a huge shout out to the [Utah Youth Village](#) who funds us and actually helps us create this content and share it with you for free. So if you could [please donate to Smarter Parenting](#). We are an organization, a charity, and so it's tax-deductible and we would appreciate any support you could give us.

I am going to be talking about [Decision Making](#) today and Decision Making is one of the things that is pressing on a lot of parents' minds especially with children who are teenagers. I get this question a lot from parents so like what was my child thinking? Why is my child making weird choices? Like I just don't understand. And we attribute it a lot of times to different things like hormones or friends and peers and all these other things, external things that may be influencing our children's decision-making skills. However, there is a systematic way that we can teach them to approach situations that guide them along and help them make choices based on their values. And having them learn this skill actually gives us better insight into how they think, what they're thinking and what the process is behind their motivations, right?

So we use this method, it's called SODAS and SODAS is an acronym. And if you don't know what an acronym is, an acronym is when you use letters to represent other words. So here in Utah, we have universities for example, are popular for using acronyms. So USC for example, or here in Utah we have UofU which is the University of Utah. USC is the University of Southern California. I mean, we abbreviate them because they're just too long to say. So SODAS is an acronym, so S-O-D-A-S they're letters, but they all stand for different words. I'm going to explain what SODAS is. [I'm going to explain the steps to SODAS](#). I'm going to explain how you can implement SODAS with your children depending on their age. And I'm going to discuss the importance of you using SODAS as a parent with your children so they can understand the process of making decisions. Why it's important for them to see you as a parent using this in order to help them make better choices. My goal is to help you teach your children how to make better choices because kids make dumb choices usually based off of emotion and emotion is unreliable, which is why it's great to have a systematic approach to dealing with situations.

So let's dive into SODAS. What is the acronym of SODAS mean? What are the words behind those? We're going to start off with the first S. The first S is situation. The O of SODAS. So S-O-D-A-S, the O is for Options. The D is for Disadvantages. The A is for Advantages. And the final S is for Solution. So we have situation, options, disadvantages, advantages and then solution. Okay. SODAS. We call it SODAS because it's easier to remember of course. And you can find a video on how to use the skill on the Smarter Parenting website. You can jump over there Problem Solving, Decision Making, SODAS Method. It's there. There's a video and it explains it. There's some really cute animation that's included there and a guide that shows younger children and family making decisions, how they make decisions using the SODAS Method.

Now as we talk about each of these steps, just pay close attention to how it works and how they all gel together. So first is situation. You have to choose a situation when your child has to make a decision, right? Or your child has to choose a situation where they have to make a decision. Then you move on to options. And under options, you always want to list three different options that they can choose from for the given situation. So they're going to have three different choices that they can make. From there you're going to list the disadvantage to each of those options, and that's under the D. And then under that you're going to list three advantages for each of those options. And then after that, based on the disadvantages, which is worse of the disadvantages, you say, "Okay, I definitely don't want to do that and that." And then which one is best of the advantages, you will come up with a solution. Okay. It sounds pretty simple and actually it's easier if you can see it. So jump over to the website so you can see what it looks like.

A situation could be anything and it can range from kids are offering me drugs at school. Okay. So let's do that. Let's do that because that's one that most teens will run into. Most children will run into when they go to school unless they're homeschooled, which is great. So let's say a friend of theirs offers them marijuana, some other illegal substance to use. The option that's a situation so let's look at options. So one option could be because we need three. One option could be that you walk away. Second option could be that you do take it and that you take the drugs. And then the third option could be, I tell a teacher. So we have a situation being offered drugs. First one is walk away. Second one is accepted. Third one is tell a teacher.

So now we're going to go down and list the disadvantages to each of those. So the first one to walk away, what's the disadvantage to that? Disadvantages? Well, my friend may not talk to me, my friend may hate me and so you're going to list a couple in there. Usually you list three if you can't, depending on the age of the child, sometimes can only list two or three. But when you're a teenager you want to list at least three disadvantages to that option. So we take the option of walking away a friend might not like me, my friend may ignore me from now on, my friend may think that I'm stuck up. Disadvantages. Then we move on to the next option. The other option was to take the drugs. What's the disadvantage? I take the drugs, I could get sick, I could end up in the hospital because I don't know what it is, I could become a drug addict. Okay. So those are the disadvantages. Then we move on to option three, which is tell the teacher will we list

some disadvantages there. So disadvantage to telling a teacher, he'll think I'm a narc, other kids will hear about it and they'll beat me up and then a third option telling a teacher teacher may not believe me and blame me instead.

So we've listed disadvantages to each of those options. And by writing it out we can visually see, "Okay, which one do we really not like. The disadvantages that would be the worst for me." Then we go down to advantages and we're going to list the advantages of each of those. Okay. Each of those options. So we go back to number one which was you're going to walk away, what's the advantage to walking away? Well, my friend will know not to offer me drugs anymore. Advantages that I'm not going to take drugs because I don't want to take drugs. Right? And you want to list three advantages for each of those. We take the second option and that was to actually take the drugs. What's the advantage? My friend will think I'm cool, I will hang out with the cool kids, I'm getting it for free. Right? Those are some advantages to that option. And then the last option, which was tell the teacher the advantages may be... And this is all depending on your child, but advantages will be the teacher will take care of it, there'll be less drugs in school and nobody will get hurt.

Once your child writes this all out and we look at disadvantages and advantages, we're going to be able to pinpoint, "Okay, what are the advantages that work best for me based on my values? What advantages are best for me?" And usually children are able to say, "Yeah, I like this one more than this one." Or, "I like this one." But you want to focus on which one is the absolute best for me. So it looks like, okay after evaluating walking away actually might be best for me because I don't want to become a drug addict. And then you can also look at the disadvantages and look at which one is the absolute worst for you. Which would be the worst? Well becoming a drug addict would be the worst. So we definitely don't want to choose that option which is take the drugs. From that determination in weighing the pros and cons, the disadvantages and the advantages we come to a solution which would be walk away. So that's the solution. I'm not going to tell the teacher because that just didn't fit. I didn't want to be a narc and then you come up with a solution. That's how you work through a SODAS and that's how SODAS works is we take a situation, we figure out three options, we come up with disadvantages, advantages, and then a solution.

One thing that I highly recommend is that you define the situation as clearly as possible and be sure that your child defines it as clearly as possible. Because by being able to define the situation, you're going to be able to come with some really concrete options and those options will lead to disadvantages, advantages. If you come up with a fairly loose and nondescript situation, it's going to be a lot harder to come up with the options. Another recommendation I have is depending on the age of your child or their maturity, you want to list as many disadvantages and as many advantages as you can think of. Now you may come up with like five disadvantages for one and maybe two for another option, that's okay and then you may come up with like five advantages for one and maybe two advantages for a different option, that's okay too. You just want to list as many as you possibly can in that list and from there you're going to be able to determine what is the best solution for you.

Now what happens when you come across a situation you have three options and then you have disadvantages and advantages but none of them feel like they're right for you because that's happened before. With the youth that I've worked with sometimes they will do this exercise and they're like, "I don't like any of the disadvantages and I don't like any of the advantages." Well, the perfect thing to do is actually to do it again, but this time choose different options and then you can list down advantages and disadvantages from there because there's always more than three options. You always have a choice of more than three options to respond to a situation. They may have a hard time coming up with it, but there are multiple ways to respond to a situation.

I also highly recommend that you do at least three options. Sometimes kids will say, "I can only think of two." You need to come up with three because we want to open up this idea that there are possibilities that exist and that they're not confined to just this and this, but that there are other choices. This also allows them to entertain the idea of, "Hey, yeah, I don't like that and I don't like that but maybe, maybe this and I don't live in a black and white kind of world I can actually make some choices and additional choices." Having your child do multiple SODAS for a situation is not uncommon if it is a difficult situation for them to resolve. So I highly recommend that if your child gets stuck, you just do another SODAS about that and you can continually do SODAS or do use this method over and over again to address any situation that your child is struggling to make a decision about.

Now earlier on I had discussed the importance of you using this method. I use it all the time with parents when I work with parents and they are struggling to make a decision on how to discipline their child. I have them do a [SODAS worksheet](#) and that way they can see that they have multiple options, they have multiple ways of addressing the issue as the disadvantages, advantages, and then coming up with the solution. The reason that I have parents do it is because I am not going to be around forever and they need to have a systematic way of approaching situations that they find daunting or complex. By doing a SODAS worksheet, they can then figure things out on their own because my goal for parents is to create this idea that they can do things on their own. I'm creating independence on their part so they're not dependent on other people to resolve issues that are happening.

So SODAS works great for parents, it also works great as a family if you're able to use this as a family. So let's say that you have an issue with the household and you want to resolve it. Use a SODAS worksheet, bring everybody to the table and go through it and walk through it and have everybody provide input. What are some options we can do as a family? What are some things we can do? I've had people use this also for other situations in their family, like planning a vacation. A family vacation. Okay, so situation, we want to go on vacation. What are our options? Okay. We got to California, let's go to New York, let's go to Florida. Disadvantages, advantages. Then the family decides, "Oh, that's a good solution." By working on all this together as a family, your children are going to see that you are systematic in your approach

and you're not ruled by emotion and that when things arise that you have a plan, you have a set way of thinking through things.

You're going to find that the more you implement and do this, the easier it becomes to do SODAS in your mind. You can actually start making decisions fairly quickly because you're already addressing them in your mind. You come to a situation, you know that there are multiple options for you and then you start weighing the pros and cons, the disadvantages and advantages, and then come up with a solution. I for one use it all the time in determining what to do next, so am I going to work on this or should I do this or what do I need to plan for? Or okay so I use it at work, I use it also in church, what do I need to prepare? Here's a situation. I need this done by such and such time. What are my options? And I use it with my family in planning like vacations, trips or planning our budget. That's another, another, another area that we can do.

What SODAS does also is it provides you a look and a peek into your child's value system. When they start listing disadvantages and advantages in their respective columns you're going to start to notice patterns of the way that they process and internalize the worlds around them. What is important to them through the advantages and the disadvantages. You're going to be able to recognize what they feel is important to them through this exercise. And by being able to do that, you open up communication with them about your own values and why things are important to you. By doing that with them, you're going to find that there's a much greater chance of you helping them resolve issues in a positive way.

Now, what ages can you use this skill? You can use it at really young ages like I've used it with children as young as five, but I've simplified it and we've still kept three options, but maybe listed less disadvantages, enlisted less advantages. So you can start as young as five and I'm using it now and I know people who are super old and they still use it as a way to address situations that may arise in their life where they're trying to figure out exactly what to do. For your children this is extremely helpful because it, again, it provides them a structure for approaching situations and problems and then solving them based on values and logic and not so much on just raw emotion which can change. It can change at any time. Teach your children this skill, use this skill as a family, implement it as just part of the process of how you resolve issues in your own lives and let your children see you doing this so that they can adopt it as well.

Pretty soon you're going to find that your children are making great decisions on their own because they're able to think through it and logically work through it. [For ADHD children, this is super helpful because sometimes they make rash decisions and those decisions are not founded in logic.](#) And so being able to work through like for example, a game plan on what they're going to do in the classroom if they start to feel antsy or they need to move around doing a SODAS around that will give them some options of things they can try and things they can do. Now you may actually do a SODAS worksheet and you may think you have a perfect solution, but then when you try it, it doesn't feel right. That's okay. Guess what you do? You go back and

you do another SODAS to figure out exactly what you should do and that's okay. That is absolutely okay. So feel free to test it around.

One thing I highly suggest when you're working with children and you're addressing a behavior that they need to correct or to do, for example, with the drugs. Once they come up with their solution, the recommendation I have for all parents in dealing with children who have to make a decision like that is to [Role-play](#) it. With the young man that I was working with, he actually had to do this with a friend of his offering him pills because he had pills and he would take pills from his moms medicine cabinet and share it with friends and said, and he felt the pressure. So we did a SODAS around it and after he came up with a solution, we Role-played it. And I pretended to be him first to kind of show him how it would look and then he did him and I was his friend offering. And as we Role-played it and I intensified my asking him to take it and to use drugs, he found that it was a lot more difficult than he thought it would be.

So again, Role-playing is this idea of we're bringing all of this knowledge into muscle memory into our bodies so they can find ways to react that are natural and that feel normal to them. So in our Role-play, he found that that didn't work. So I guess what we did, we actually went back and we did a SODAS about it and he came up with a decent different solution. It's kind of this idea that we're exploring these situations in these problems and finding the very best option that we can that meets our own values and our own beliefs and our own ability to deal with those situations. So I highly, highly recommend that you use this skill. I highly recommend you jump over to the Smarter Parenting website and watch this video. The video is fantastic actually, and it gives you step-by-step how to use SODAS as a method to making better decisions. Again, use it with children as young as five when they can comprehend all the way until they're older. You may need to adjust how many disadvantages, but always keep the options to three. You may want to adjust the advantages, disadvantages for younger children, but as your child gets older, you want to list as many disadvantages and advantages as possible so you can really look at what decision or what option is best for you.

So yeah, that's it for me. Holy cow that was a ton. I am actually working right now on a SODAS of my own and that is on future planning. Like I'm trying to figure out exactly retirement and things like that. I'm young enough that I can make some decisions that in the longterm are going to have some longterm effects. But I'm using SODAS right down to determine okay, how am I planning for my future? How am I planning for retirement? How am I planning for what's going to happen in the future in case something happens. So I'm finding it super helpful actually right now in my own life in working through this and I'm working through it with my wife as well. So we're going through a SODAS and listing disadvantages of investing in properties and investing in just the market and just sticking it into a mattress in our bed, which we absolutely is an option we probably will never do. But as you can see it can be used for anything, it really can be used for anything.

Anytime you're coming up with a situation, anytime your child is coming up with situation, do this. Teach your child how to do this skill and in fact you can have your child address behaviors

before you address behaviors by having them fill out a SODA sheet. So if a child is misbehaving, you can say, "Well, we'll talk about it, but I want you to do a SODAS sheet first." Have them fill it out, then they come down, you talk about it, they come up with a solution already on their own and then you can evaluate whether or not that is effective. That helps your child internalize and realize, "Hey, I am in control of what I need to do and I have two options and choices that I need to make. And I can come up with my own solutions." It creates independence on their part.

Fantastic, fantastic stuff. If you have any questions about this, feel free to contact us. Sign up for a mini session, let's talk about Decision Making and SODAS and how to implement this with your child and helping them gain independence and also helping them make better choices in the long run. That's it for me and I will see you again next time. Super excited. Keep sharing more and more parenting skills with you. In fact, we will be covering in the next one. Next podcast we'll be talking about consequences. Super excited about that one that's going to be great one. And then we'll be talking rewards and we'll move on from there. So tune in, share this podcast with family and friends, rate it five-stars on iTunes if you can. That helps us become more visible so people can find us and see us and share this message. And again, shout out to the Utah Youth Village for supporting Smarter Parenting. Thank you all and I will catch you later. All right, bye.

RESOURCES MENTIONED IN THIS PODCAST

[Behavior skills of the Teaching-Family Model](#)

[Behavior skill: Decision Making \(SODAS Method\)](#)

[SODAS worksheet](#)

[SODAS steps](#)

[Blog post: Using Decision Making to help your ADHD kids make better decisions](#)

[Behavior skill: Preventive Teaching](#)

[Behavior skill: Effective Praise](#)

[Behavior skill: ABC's of Behavior](#)

[Behavior skill: Effective Communication](#)

[Behavior skill: Role-playing](#)

[Behavior skill: Observe and Describe](#)

[Behavior skill: Correcting Behaviors](#)

[The Teaching-Family Model](#)

[Ep #46: Understanding the ABC's of Behavior](#)

[Ep #47: Mastering Observe and Describe](#)

[Ep #48: What it takes to change behavior](#)

[Ep #49: Compound effect of Effective Communication](#)

[Ep #50: Changing behavior through praise](#)

[Ep #51: Finding Success with Preventive Teaching](#)

[Ep #52: How to fix negative behaviors](#)

[Ep #53: The importance of Following Instructions](#)

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