

CHOICES

Scenario 23

Which way?

You are on a hike in the mountains with your scout group.

You are doing orienteering – maps and clues and compasses.

There is a special prize for the person who manages to get back to camp first.

You come to a fork in the track.

Is it this way – or that way?

You look at the map – and remember that the main track is off to the right. You have been here before. And you are the first to get to this point. It's only 10 minutes back to camp – and the prize.

At this point Amir appears.

"I'm really confused," he says. "Have you worked it out?"

"I don't know." You scratch your head.

"I think it's that way," he says. He points off to the left.

"Could be."

You hesitate. Should you tell him the truth?

But you really want to win that prize.

Amir heads off down the track to the left.

"See you back at camp!"

What should you do?

A You call out, “Amir, I was wrong. You need to go right.”

What next?

You and Amir walk down the track.

For a while you say nothing. Then he says,

“I’m glad we’re walking together. We don’t see much of one another. Can I tell you something?”

“Go ahead.

“I always thought you didn’t much like me. But helping me out back there ...”

You smile.

“I suddenly remembered the right way. I couldn’t let you get lost, could I?”

“No. Thanks so much!”

And you high five.

Back at camp, you share the prize – a big chocolate bar.

You break it in half and sit eating it.

And have a proper conversation with your new friend.

Think about it

This situation is a good example of what has been called the problem of ‘omission’ (leaving out, or *not* telling).

When you know something important, and knowingly *don’t* act on it – that’s deliberate omission. And it’s a nasty thing to do.

It might have minor consequences, or serious ones. But it is a form of deliberate hurt. It is a close cousin of a lie, but more sneaky. It hides behind ‘doing nothing’.

Let’s take an extreme example. An old lady is crossing a road. A car is coming, too fast. She doesn’t see it coming. You can do nothing – or rush out and pull her back.

Every action has a consequence. Doing *nothing* can sometimes be just as harmful as a bad act.

“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good people do nothing.” (Edmund Burke)

Do you want to look at another scenario involving hurting others? (Go to 14)

Do you want to try the scenario again? (Go to 23)

B You watch Amir head down the track to the left. You smile and take the path to the right.

What next?

Ten minutes later, you are back in camp.

“Hurray! You win. Congratulations!”

The scout leader gives you the prize – a giant chocolate bar.

You sit and eat it. You won.

An hour goes by.

There is no sign of Amir.

“Did anyone see Amir?” asks the leader. “It’s going to be dark in a little while. Anyone?”

What can you say?

If you admit you saw him – and gave him the wrong directions – what then?

You feel sick. You could have helped him. And you didn’t – because you wanted to win – at any cost.

Just before dark, one of the senior scouts comes back into camp. Amir is with him. He is cold and frightened. He has a blanket around him.

“It’s all right. He’s safe.”

Amir looks at you. He knows what you did.

If only you could go back to that fork in the track. If only you’d said something.

Think about it

Selfishness, wanting to win, competitiveness – are all a normal part of life.

But there must be limits. When we are part of a group, we owe things to other people in that group.

If we want people to be kind to us, we need to be kind to them.

The concept of 'winning at all costs' is a bad idea. If you win, and the other person loses, the balance is out. It will cause problems. You might feel happy for a while, but – at what cost?

“If you want others to be happy, practise compassion. If you want to be happy, practise compassion.” (Dalai Lama)

Do you want to look at another scenario involving compassion? (Go to 3)

Do you want to try the scenario again? (Go to 23)