

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 or have a partner with 2 young 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!”)

Unexpected expense occurs:

Now tell them there’s been a change.

- The person working full time has been reduce to 32 hours per week. 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. The person working two part-time jobs just got laid off from one with no severance pay. They have to take off 2 candies to adjust.
- Tell the group to take off 2 candies and adjust the rest as needed.
- One final change. For those who chose an apartment as their housing, let them know that they have been evicted for not paying rent on time, and for those who chose to own a home, let them know that they are being foreclosed on because they failed to make their house payments. Remove 3 more candies.

How UW programs can help this family:

Ask participants for ideas of how this family can use UW resources to help?

- If anyone says food, shelter or emergency shelter, give them 2 candies
- If anyone says providing their children with after school programs, give them 2 candies
- If anyone says job training programs give them 2 candies.
- 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.

