**Trolley Problem – Ethical Decision Making Exercise**

**INSTRUCTIONS**

I. Read the Trolley Problem Setup and Scenario 1 to a group of students.

II. Ask those that choose Option 1 to stand on one side of the room, and those that choose Option 2 to stand on the other side of the room.

III. Ask for volunteers to share why they made their choice.

IV. Discuss what personal value they are using to help them make their choice. For example, did they choose Option 1 because they want the greatest good for the greatest number of people? Did they choose Option 2 because they don’t want to be responsible for causing the death of someone?

V. Proceed through the other scenarios asking students to stand on sides of the room, asking why students made the decisions they did, and which value(s) they are using to guide their decisions.

**SCENARIO SETUP**

Suppose that you are the driver of a trolley car. It is the first run of the day, and there is no one on the trolley besides you. As you start down a hill, you realize the breaks on the trolley car aren’t working because the break line has been cut.

**SCENARIO 1**

- You are currently on track A, but you can steer the trolley onto track B if you choose to flip the switch.
- Five people are working on track A, and one person is working on track B.
- Anyone on the track along which your runaway trolley travels will be killed.
- Would you change tracks and kill one person to spare 5 (Option 1), or would you do nothing and allow the trolley to continue on its path (Option 2)?
- Why would you make this choice? What personal value is guiding this decision?

Option 1 = Greatest good for the greatest number (do what you can to save as many lives as possible)
Option 2 = Do no harm (don’t be the cause of anyone getting killed)

**SCENARIO 2**

- There is no track B, just track A with 5 people working on it.
- You are no longer the driver, but you are standing on a bridge and the runaway trolley will be going below you soon and will strike and kill 5 people.
- You can stop the trolley by dropping something heavy on the tracks below.
- Would you push a very large man off the bridge and onto the tracks to stop the trolley, even if it meant the large man would die (Option 1)? Or do nothing and allow the trolley to continue on its path (Option 2)?
- Why would you make this choice, and what personal values are you using?
- Did you choose the same Option as before?
- Is pushing the large man onto the tracks the same as throwing the switch in SCENARIO 1?
SCENARIO 3
- Same as SCENARIO 2, but this time you are 100% sure that the large man is the same person who cut the brakes on the trolley and caused this whole situation.
- Would you choose Option 1 or Option 2 and why? What personal values are you using?
- Is it ok to cause harm or death to 1 bad person to save the lives of 5 people you don't know?
- For those of you who thought it is better to “do no harm”, does that value still hold true for you in this case?

SCENARIO 4
- Same as SCENARIO 3, but instead of 5 people working on the tracks, there is only 1 person working on the tracks.
- Would you choose Option 1 or Option 2 and why? What personal values are you using?
- Is it ok to cause harm or death to 1 bad person to save the life of 1 person you don't know?
- For those of you who thought it is better to do the greatest good for the greatest number of people, does that value still hold true for you in this case?

SCENARIO 5
- Back to SCENARIO 1 (Track A has 5 people working on it, Track B has 1 person working on it, you are the driver and can switch to Track B if you choose)
- The 1 person on Track B is your mother or father.
- Would you choose Option 1 or Option 2 and why? What personal values are you using?
- For those of you who thought it is better to do the greatest good for the greatest number of people, does that value still hold true?
- Are you allowed to make an “Ethical Compromise” in certain circumstances? For Example, can you say “I support doing the greatest good for greatest number unless it involves hurting those I love?”
- Do you have another value that takes precedence, such as “do anything you can to protect your friends/family first”?

Questions for Reflection:
- Is the morality of an action determined by whether, compared to the other available options, it maximizes the sum total of happiness of all the people affected by it?
- It is always wrong to cause another person’s death if you can help it?
- Is not making a choice considered a choice? Is not taking action considered an action?
- Is it ok to make an “Ethical Compromise” in certain situations?