

CHOICES

Scenario 10

I don't know him

You and your brother are in a park on a sunny day. Your Mom has gone to the ice cream stand by the lake just down the hill.

On the bench next to you, by the big oak tree, is a homeless man. He looks like he has been sleeping rough. He has a couple of big bags nearby and a blanket. He looks at you and gives a faint smile. He seems harmless enough.

You look at your watch. Your Mom is taking her time.

Now the old man has fallen sideways. He is slumped over on the bench.

Is he sick, you ask yourself.

You go up to him and say, "Are you all right?"

There is no reply. You touch him, ever so gently, on the arm. He doesn't respond. His mouth is wide open and his eyes are closed. He isn't moving at all.

What should you do?

A You say, "I don't know him. This is not my problem." And head down the hill looking for your mother, pretending you can't see the old man.

What next?

You take your little brother by the hand and walk quickly down the hill.

Your mother appears with the ice creams.

The three of you sit and eat your ice creams.

"What's the matter?" your Mom asks. "Is something wrong?"

“No. Nothing.”

Ten minutes later you hear the sound of an ambulance. It arrives in the park with flashing lights. There is now a crowd of people around the big oak tree.

“Something’s wrong. It looks like someone is seriously ill.”

You say nothing. You lick your ice cream.

Think about it

This situation involves what is called the ‘bystander effect’. A person sees something horribly wrong. Should they act, or wait for others to act?

After some very nasty crimes years ago researchers started looking at what causes people to get involved. Before helping someone, a bystander asks: (1) Is something wrong? (2) Is it life threatening? (3) Can I personally help?

A complicating factor is that if other people are around, most people think: “Someone else will solve this situation – I don’t need to do anything.” The catch is that *everyone* may think the same thing – and nothing happens.

It might help to think of it this way. Suppose the old man was someone you knew. Would you turn away?

As a young person, there is an additional problem. “I’m only a kid. What can I do?”

If the problem is bad enough, doing *nothing* amounts to a real error. The consequences could be very serious. A life could be at stake.

Sometimes we have to act.

Do you want to look at another scenario about getting involved in a dangerous situation? (Go to 15)

Do you want to try the scenario again? (Go to 10)

B You decide you can’t do nothing. At school you have been shown how to call for help in an emergency. You dial 911.

What next?

You tell your brother to go get your Mom straight away.

You go to the old man.

He is drooling, but still breathing. You grab his blanket and wrap it around him.

You talk to him. You give him some water from your bottle. You hold his hand.

Your Mom comes running up. She sees immediately what's happening, and she starts talking to him.

The ambulance arrives, with flashing lights.

The paramedics take over. They give him oxygen. They check him.

Then they put him on a stretcher and wheel him away.

One of them turns to you and says,

"You did the right thing. He's going to be all right. Good work."

Think about it

Most children think that they don't have to be responsible – adults will solve all the problems.

But there are situations when acting responsibly may involve *other* people – looking after siblings, reporting dangers. If you saw a house on fire, you wouldn't do nothing. If your little sister fell from a tree, you wouldn't do nothing.

This scenario pushes the boundaries of what most people feel comfortable with: "I don't know him. Why should I get involved?"

But deep in most of us is the human need to help others. And that's almost always a good thing.

Do you want to look at another scenario in which you are tempted to do nothing? (Go to 5)

Do you want to try the scenario again? (Go to 10)