

CHOICES

Scenario 22

It's not far

You are on holiday at a lovely beach resort in the tropics.

The sea is a magnificent bright blue. The sun is shining.

Your parents have gone off for a massage, leaving you and your sister by the pool.

"Now don't go into the sea while we're away - OK?"

"Stay here near the lifeguard," adds your Mom. "And keep out of the sun."

But lying by the pool is boring.

Out beyond the breakers is the reef. It's perhaps 150 yards away.

"I'm going to swim out to the reef," you say. "We saw that guy doing it this morning."

"But they said not to. You can't!" She is really upset.

"Don't worry. I'm a strong swimmer. It's not far."

"And they said there was a storm coming. Please don't go!"

"Don't be a nervous Nelly. I'll be fine."

You stand up, cross the beach and walk into the sea.

On the shore, your sister is jumping up and down, seriously worried.

What should you do?

A You wade into the sea and call, "See you later." And dive in.

What next?

You power through the water. This is so much fun. What could go wrong?

After 50 metres, you look back. The beach is a long way off.

Your sister has disappeared.

Ahead, the reef is even further away.

You look up. Storm clouds are gathering.

“Was this the right thing to do? Maybe I should go back.”

You turn and head back, reluctantly.

But no matter how hard you swim, the beach is still the same distance away. And you seem to be going sideways. The undertow! You’d forgotten about that.

You look around. You’re on your own. No one is around. Even the beach is deserted.

“HELP!” you cry.

Think about it

Psychologists warn about something called ‘optimism bias’. It’s the tendency most people have to think that all will be well no matter what.

It comes from limited experience of negative events. I haven’t seen anyone in trouble in the water - so I don’t need to worry about it. Needless to say, this is not very logical. Even if 99 people swam to the reef and survived, would you want to be the one who didn’t?

When people think about risk, they tend to worry about the wrong things. They worry about death from lightning – but in America there are only 8 per year (in a population of 350 million). Death in a plane crash – the odds are 1 in 11 million. Death from terrorist attack – hardly ever. But nearly 400,000 people die each year from drowning.

Risk is something to be thought about carefully. Some risks have a low chance of hurting you. Others – like swimming out to sea on your own, with a cross current, and a storm coming – are just asking for trouble. You need to choose your risks.

Do you want to look at another scenario involving risk? (Go to 15)

Do you want to try the scenario again? (Go to 22)

B You stay by the pool. You roll over and go back to sleep.

What next?

Half an hour later, the storm has come in.

The palm trees are bending over. The wind is roaring. No one is in the water. The waves are crashing in on the beach.

Your parents come back to get you and your sister.

They hurry you inside the resort lounge. You sit and watch the storm break over the bay. You are warm and dry and sipping a nice drink.

“So glad you were where we left you,” says your mother.

“But they wouldn’t disobey, would they?”

You and your sister exchange glances.

“Never.”

Think about it

Much is made of children having their independence, and making their own decisions.

All very well. But in cases of life and death, going it alone is asking for trouble.

Parents almost always give orders for good reasons – to protect children. They have raised you from babyhood. They want to keep you around. They have been alive for years longer, and have seen much more of what life can bring – good and bad. A sensible child will go along with what they order.

There’s no point in asserting your independence, and ending up dead.

“Obedience is less painful than regret.”

Do you want to look at another scenario involving parents? (Go to 9)

Do you want to try the scenario again? (Go to 22)