

Introduction to Pros and Cons

Today we are going to go over the exercise that most people know as Pros and Cons, and some people call as a Cost Benefit Analysis, which is an essential skill to learn in any form of decision making. For many people who have limited emotional sensitivity, and grow up in healthy environments, developing this skill is an automatic thing to do. They learn at an early age how to weigh up the options that are available and make decisions from a wise mind perspective.

For those of us that fall into the category of Highly Sensitive People (HSP) with dominant Emotional Child parts in our personality system, this skill is something we have to make a conscious effort to learn and develop. The eventual goal of using the pros and cons skill is to help us see that accepting reality and tolerating distress leads to better outcomes than rejecting reality and refusing to tolerate distress. This skill consists of spending time to mindfully consider the positive and negative aspects of both acting and not acting on the behavioural urges we experience in what we see as crisis situations.

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We primarily want to use the Pros and Cons exercise when we have to make a decision between two or more options, and we want to examine the advantages and disadvantages of each possible choice. Pros and Cons can be very important in helping us make the “wise” choice, and it’s true that all of us use the Pros and Cons exercise sometimes, even if only subconsciously, when making important decisions. Pros and cons can also help us resist urges to act impulsively or do things that are destructive, particularly when we are blended with parts that exist inside our emotion mind.

Pros and cons can help us all resist urges to quit and give up on life. It can help us resist actions such as using drugs, bingeing and purging, or having angry outbursts aimed directly at others. Pros and Cons is a way to engage our Healthy Adult, and to slow things down enough to give us the space to figure things out in a helpful and effective way.

Completing a Pros and Cons exercise involves writing down the positive and negative consequences of tolerating distress by resisting impulsive behaviors, as well as the positive and negative consequences of not tolerating distress by engaging in impulsive behaviors. On the following page you will find the process that’s used for effectively completing this exercise.

Describe the Crisis Behavior

Start by describing the crisis behavior you are trying to stop. A crisis behavior is any behavior that in the short run, long run, or both is damaging to your own self-interest and wellbeing. It is an ineffective behaviour pattern when it comes to Living the Life you Want to Live according to your true core Values and Beliefs.

Examine the Advantages and Disadvantages of the Behavior

Next, examine the advantages and disadvantages (pros and cons) of the participating in the behavioural response that your system has an urge to act on. It is really important to get honest with yourself at this point in time, leave no stone unturned, and explore every angle you can think of. Doing this will give you a complete picture from a dialectical perspective.

Consider Both Short-Term and Long-Term Consequences

When you are doing Pros and Cons, don't forget to consider both the short-term and long-term consequences of the behavior you are examining. Sometimes we can only see the short-term benefits, as these are the ones we are used to responding to. This is the Problem with Instant Gratification, as it can activate a filter that only allows us to see things from this rigid point of view.

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Consider Pros and Cons for Each Different Crisis Urge

Make up separate lists of pros and cons for each different crisis urge you are working on. Imagine that you are deciding among using a substance, filing for a divorce, quitting a job, or another impulsive action, it is important to consider the pros and cons of each action (using a substance, filing for a divorce, quitting a job) separately. It is also important to write separate lists for the pros and cons of not engaging in these actions. Doing so thoroughly will once again provide the dialectical perspective we are trying to create to get the complete picture of what's going on.

Rehearse Pros and Cons Multiple Times

Rehearse the pros of resisting urges and the cons of giving in to urges multiple times before overwhelming urges hit. Such rehearsal makes it more likely that the pros of avoiding destructive behavior and cons of engaging in destructive behavior will pop into your mind when needed. The idea here is to get thinking about the long-term benefits of avoiding destructive behavior to become stronger and thinking about immediate benefits of destructive behavior to become weaker.”

Review Earlier Pros and Cons When a Crisis Urge Strikes

Review the pros and cons you have written earlier when an overwhelming emotion or urge hits. If these are not available, then this is the time to write up such pros and cons. However, it can be very difficult to do this in emotion mind, so it is advisable to solicit support from someone else for doing pros and cons while you are in a crisis.

Say No to Crisis Urges

It can be very helpful to say out loud or yell ‘No!’ when an overwhelming emotion or urge hits. Once this is done, it is important to distract yourself from the urge and from tempting events. Say to yourself, ‘No, that’s it; there is no going back,’ or something similar.

On the following page you will find a worksheet that can help you with completing this exercise. Remember, it is incredibly important to put pen to paper with this type of problem, as it not only assists us with seeing the bigger picture, it also slows down the process of decision making, which can help us with not taking fast reactionary actions that make the situation worse than it might’ve already been.

Pros and Cons Worksheet

	PROS	CONS
Short Term		
Long Term		