

LIFESKILLS

Adolescence, a vital stage of growth and development, marks the period of transition from childhood to adulthood. It is characterized by rapid physiological changes and psychosocial maturation. Adolescence is also the stage when young people extend their relationships beyond parents and family and are intensely influenced by their peers and the outside world in general. As adolescents mature cognitively, their mental process becomes more analytical. They are now capable of abstract thinking, better articulation and of developing an independent ideology. These are truly the years of creativity, idealism, buoyancy and a spirit of adventure. But these are also the years of experimentation and risk-taking, of giving in to negative peer pressure, of taking uninformed decisions on crucial issues, especially relating to their bodies and their sexuality. Adolescence is thus a turning point in one's life, a period of increased potential but also one of greater vulnerability.

KEY ISSUES & CONCERNS OF ADOLESCENT STUDENTS

Developing an Identity

* Self – awareness helps adolescents understand themselves and establish their personal identity. Lack of information and skills prevent them from effectively exploring their potential and establishing a positive image and sound career perspective.

Managing Emotions

* Adolescents have frequent mood changes reflecting feelings of anger, sadness, happiness, fear, shame, guilt, and love. Very often, they are unable to understand the emotional turmoil.

* They do not have a supportive environment in order to share their concerns with others. Counseling facilities are not available.

Building Relationships

* As a part of growing up, adolescents redefine their relationships with parents, peers and members of the opposite sex. Adults have high expectations from them and do not understand their feelings.

* Adolescents need social skills for building positive and healthy relationships with others including peer of opposite sex. They need to understand the importance of mutual respect and socially defined boundaries of every relationship.

Resisting Peer Pressure

* Adolescents find it difficult to resist peer pressure. Some of them may yield to these pressures and engage in experimentation.

* Aggressive self conduct; irresponsible behaviour and substance abuse involve greater risks with regard to physical and mental health.

* The experiment with smoking and milder drugs can lead to switching over to hard drugs and addiction at a later stage.

Acquiring Information, Education and Services on issues of Adolescence

* Exposure to media and mixed messages from the fast changing world have left adolescents with many unanswered questions

* The widening gap in communication between adolescents and parents is a matter of great concern.

* Teachers still feel inhibited to discuss issues frankly and sensitively. * Adolescents seek information from their peer group who are also ill informed and some may fall prey to quacks.

* Fear and hesitation prevents them from seeking knowledge on preventive methods and medical help if suffering from RTIs and STIs.

Communicating and Negotiating safer life situations

* Sexually active adolescents face greater health risks.

* Girls may also face mental and emotional problems related to early sexual initiation.

* Resisting the vulnerability to drug abuse, violence and conflict with law or society.

Understanding Life Skills – A Teacher's prospective

Life skills have been defined as *“the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”* (WHO). **‘Adaptive’** means that a person is flexible in approach and is able to adjust in different circumstances. **‘Positive behaviour’** implies that a person is forward looking and even in difficult situations, can find a ray of hope and opportunities to find solutions.

The terms **‘Livelihood skills’** or occupational/vocational skills refer to capabilities, resources and opportunities to pursue individual and household economic goals and relate to income generation. Thus, Life skills are distinct from livelihood skills.

Key Life Skills

Life skills include psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others, and cope with managing their lives in a healthy and productive manner. Essentially, there are two kinds of skills - those related to thinking termed as **“thinking skills”**; and skills related to dealing with others termed as **“social skills”**.

While thinking skills relate to reflection at a personal level, social skills include interpersonal skills and do not necessarily depend on logical thinking. It is the combination of these two types of skills that are needed for achieving assertive behaviour and negotiating effectively. **“Emotional”** can be perceived as a skill not only in making rational decisions but also in being able to make others agree to one's point of view. To do that, coming to terms first with oneself is important. Thus, self management is an important skill including managing/coping with feelings, emotions, stress and resisting peer and family pressure. Young people as advocates need both thinking and social skills for consensus building and advocacy on issues of concern.

The Ten core Life Skills as laid down by WHO are:

1. Self-awareness
2. Empathy
3. Critical thinking
4. Creative thinking
5. Decision making
6. Problem Solving
7. Effective communication
8. Interpersonal relationship
9. Coping with stress
10. Coping with emotion

* Self-awareness includes recognition of 'self', our character, our strengths and weaknesses, desires and dislikes. Developing self-awareness can help us to recognize when we are stressed or feel under pressure. It is often a prerequisite to effective communication and interpersonal relations, as well as for developing empathy with others.

* Empathy - To have a successful relationship with our loved ones and society at large, we need to understand and care about other peoples' needs, desires and feelings. Empathy is the ability to imagine what life is like for another person. Without empathy, our communication with others will amount to one-way traffic. Worst, we will be acting and behaving according to our self-interest and are bound to run into problems. No man is an island, no woman either! We grow up in relationships with many people – parents, brothers and sisters, cousins, uncles and aunts, classmates, friends and neighbours.

When we understand ourselves as well as others, we are better prepared to communicate our needs and desires. We will be more equipped to say what we want people to know, present our thoughts and ideas and tackle delicate issues without offending other people. At the same time, we will be able to elicit support from others, and win their understanding.

Empathy can help us to accept others, who may be very different from ourselves. This can improve social interactions, especially, in situations of ethnic or cultural diversity.

Empathy can also help to encourage nurturing behaviour towards people in need of care and assistance, or tolerance, as is the case with AIDS sufferers, or people with mental disorders, who may be stigmatized and ostracized by the very people they depend upon for support.

* Critical thinking is an ability to analyze information and experiences in an objective manner. Critical thinking can contribute to health by helping us to recognize and assess the factors that influence attitudes and behaviour, such as values, peer pressure and the media.

* Creative thinking is a novel way of seeing or doing things that is characteristic of four components – fluency (generating new ideas), flexibility (shifting perspective easily), originality (conceiving of something new), and elaboration (building on other ideas).

* Decision making helps us to deal constructively with decisions about our lives. This can have consequences for health. It can teach people how to actively make decisions about their actions in relation to healthy assessment of different options and, what effects these different decisions are likely to have.

* Problem solving helps us to deal constructively with problems in our lives. Significant problems that are left unresolved can cause mental stress and give rise to accompanying physical strain.

* Interpersonal relationship skills help us to relate in positive ways with the people we interact with. This may mean being able to make and keep friendly relationships, which can be of great importance to our mental and social well-being. It may mean keeping, good relations with family members, which are an important source of social support. It may also mean being able to end relationships constructively.

* Effective communication means that we are able to express ourselves, both verbally and non-verbally, in ways that are appropriate to our cultures and situations. This means being able to express opinions and desires, and also needs and fears. And it may mean being able to ask for advice and help in a time of need.

* Coping with stress means recognizing the sources of stress in our lives, recognizing how this affects us, and acting in ways that help us control our levels of stress, by changing our environment or lifestyle and learning how to relax.

* Coping with emotions means involving recognizing emotions within us and others, being aware of how emotions influence behaviour and being able to respond to emotions appropriately. Intense emotions like anger or sadness can have negative effects on our health if we do not respond appropriately.

Important FAQs:

(a) How are Life Skills important for growing minds?

We find that behaviour does not always follow the mind. This is when incidents of **“I know but I can’t help it”** occur. What we need is the ability to act responsibly. Life skills enable us to translate knowledge, attitudes and values into actual abilities.

(b) Why is there a need for Life Skills Education?

The host of factors that promote high risk behaviour such as alcoholism, drug abuse and casual relationships are boredom, rebellion, disorientation, peer pressure and curiosity. The psychological push factors such as the inability to tackle emotional pain, conflicts, frustrations and anxieties about the future are often the driving force for high risk behaviour. Life skills training is an efficacious tool for empowering the youth to act responsibly, take initiative and take control. It is based on the assumption that when young people are able to rise above emotional impasses arising from daily conflicts, entangled relationships and peer pressure, they are less likely to resort to anti social or high risk behaviours.

(c) Who needs Life Skills?

The Life Skills programme is a school based programme where Life Skills are imparted in a supportive learning environment. They are applicable for all ages of children and adolescents in school. However, the age group targeted is mainly 10-18, adolescent years, since young people of this age group seem to be most vulnerable to behaviour related health problems. The programme is for the promotion of health and well being and targeted group is all children.

(d) How are they imparted?

The method used in teaching of Life Skills builds upon the social learning theory and on what we know of how young people learn from their environment; from observing how others behave and what consequences arise from behaviour.

It involves the process of Participatory learning using 4 basic components: 1. Practical activities

2. Feedback and reflections

3. Consolidation and reinforcement

4. Practical application to day to day life challenges

(e) Peer Educators Approach?

The peer training approach, involves one teacher and 3-4 student representatives from each school (forming the core life skills team) at the school. They learn these skills through active learning and participation in a 6 session inter school training workshop programme. They further train

their peers at school in these skills through the same process. They follow up with the main resource team for feedback, discussions, training material etc.

(f) Different methods that can be used to enhance Life Skills in students? Each workshop is specially designed to impart a particular skill and involves all or some of the following techniques:

- Class discussions
- Brainstorming
- Demonstration and guided practice
- Role plays
- Audio and visual activities, e.g., arts, music, theatre, dance
- Decision mapping or problem trees
- Small groups
- Educational games and simulations
- Case studies
- Story telling
- Debates

KEY STEPS IN LIFE SKILLS APPLICATION Defining and Promoting Life Skills

- Defining the skills: What skills are most relevant to influencing a targeted behaviour or condition; what will the student be able to do if the skill-building exercises are successful?
- Generating positive and negative examples of how the skills might be applied • Encouraging verbal rehearsal and action
- Correcting misperceptions about what the skill is and how to do it.

Promoting Skills Acquisition and Performance

- Providing opportunities to observe Life skills being applied effectively • Providing opportunities for practice with coaching and feedback. • Evaluating performance.
- Providing feedback and recommendations for corrective action.

Fostering Skill Maintenance/Generalisation

- Providing opportunities
- Fostering self – evaluation and skill adjustment.

MATRIX OF LIFE SKILLS IN A CLASSROOM

TEACHING METHOD	DESCRIPTION	BENEFITS	PROCESS
<p>CLASS DISCUSSION (In small or large groups)</p>	<p>The class examines a problem or topic of interest with the goal of better understanding an issue or skill, reaching the best solution, or developing new ideas and directions for the group.</p>	<p>Provides opportunities for students to learn from one another and practice turning to one another in solving problems. Enables students to deepen their understanding of the topic and personalize their connection to it. Helps develop skills in listening, assertiveness, and empathy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide how to arrange seating for discussion • Identify the goal of the discussion and communicate it clearly • Pose meaningful, open-ended questions. • Keep track of discussion progress
<p>BRAIN STORMING</p>	<p>Students actively generate a broad variety of ideas about a particular topic or question in a given, often brief period of time.</p> <p>Quantity of ideas is the main objective of brain storming. Evaluating or debating the ideas occurs later.</p>	<p>Allows students to generate ideas quickly and spontaneously. Helps students use their imagination and break loose from fixed patterns of response. Good discussion starter because the class can creatively generate ideas. It is essential to evaluate the pros and cons of each idea or rank ideas according to certain criteria.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate a leader and a recorder • State the issue or problem and ask for ideas • Students may suggest any idea that comes to mind • Do not discuss the ideas when they are first suggested • Record ideas in a place where

			<p>everyone can see them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After brainstorming, review the ideas and add, delete, categorise
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ROLE PLAYS	<p>Role play is an informal dramatization in which people act out a suggested situation.</p>	<p>Provides an excellent strategy for practicing skills; experiencing how one might handle a potential situation in real life; increasing empathy for others and their point of view; and increasing insight into one's own feelings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the situation to be role played • Select role players • Give instructions to role players • Start the role play • Discuss what happened
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<p>SMALL GROUP/BUZZ GROUP</p>	<p>For small group work, a large class is divided into smaller groups of six or less and given a short time to accomplish a task, carry out an action, or discuss a specific topic, problem or question.</p>	<p>Useful when groups are large and time is limited. Maximises student input. Lets students get to know one another better and increases the likelihood that they will consider how another person thinks. Helps students hear and learn from their peers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State the purpose of discussion and the amount of time available • Form small groups • Position seating so that members can hear each other easily • Ask group to appoint recorder • At the end have recorder describe the group's discussion
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<p>GAMES AND SIMULATIONS</p>	<p>Students play games as activities that can be used for teaching content, critical thinking, problem solving and decision making and for review and reinforcement.</p> <p>Simulations are activities structured to feel like the real experience.</p>	<p>Games and simulations promote fun, active learning, and rich discussion in the classroom as participants work hard to prove their points or earn points. They require the combined use of knowledge, attitudes, and skills and allow students to test out assumptions and abilities in relatively safe environment.</p>	<p>Games:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind students that the activity is meant to be enjoyable and that it does not matter who wins <p>Simulations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work best when they are brief and discussed immediately • Students should be asked to imagine themselves in a situation or should play a structured game of activity to experience a feeling that might occur in another setting
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<p>SITUATION ANALYSIS AND CASE STUDIES</p>	<p>Situation analysis activities allow students to think about, analyse, and discuss situations they might encounter. Case studies are real life stories that describe in detail what happened to a community, family school, or individual.</p>	<p>Situation analysis allows students to explore problems and dilemmas and safely test solutions; it provides opportunities to work together, share ideas, and learn that people sometimes see things differently.</p> <p>Case studies are powerful catalysts for thought and discussion.</p> <p>Students consider the forces that converge to make an individual or group act in one way or another, and then evaluate the consequences. By engaging in this thinking process, students can improve their own decision making skills.</p> <p>Case studies can be tied to specific activities to help students practice healthy responses before they find themselves confronted with a health risk.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guiding questions are useful to spur thinking and discussion • Facilitator must be adept at teasing out the key points and step back and pose some 'bigger' overarching questions • Situation analyses and case studies need adequate time for processing and creative thinking • Teacher must act as the facilitator and coach rather than the sole source of 'answer' and knowledge.
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TEACHING METHOD	DESCRIPTION	BENEFITS	PROCESS
DEBATES	<p>In a debate, a particular problem or issue is presented to the class, and students must take a position on resolving the problem or issue. The class can debate as a whole or in small groups.</p>	<p>Provides opportunity to address a particular issue in depth and creatively. Health issues lend themselves well: students can debate, for instance, whether smoking should be banned in public places in a community. Allows students to defend a position that may mean a lot to them. Offers a chance to practice higher thinking skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow students to take positions of their choosing if too many students take the same position, ask for volunteers to take the opposing point of view • Provide students with time to research their topic. • Do not allow students to dominate at the expenses of other speakers. • Make certain that students show request for the opinions and thoughts of other debates. • Maintain control in the classroom and keep the debate on topic.

<p>STORY TELLING</p>	<p>The instructor or students tell or read a story to a group.</p> <p>Pictures, comics and photo novels, filmstrips and slides can supplement.</p> <p>Students are encouraged to think about and discuss important (health related) points or methods raised by the story after it is told.</p>	<p>Can help students think about local problems and develop critical thinking skills.</p> <p>Students can engage their creative skills in helping to write stories, or a group can work interactively to tell stories. Story telling lends itself to drawing analogies or making comparisons, helping people to discover healthy solutions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep the story simple and clear. Make one or two main points. • Be sure the story (and pictures, if included) relate to the lives of the students. • Make the story dramatic enough to be interesting. Try to include situations of happiness, sadness, excitement, courage, serious thought, decisions, and problem solving behaviours.
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Life skills-Commandments to Remember *I read, I forget, I discuss, I remember, I do, I inculcate.*

1. Life skills are essentially those abilities that help promote overall wellbeing and competence in young people as they face the realities of life.
2. Life skills are the beginning of wisdom which focuses on behaviour change or developmental approach designed to address a balance of three areas- knowledge, attitude and skills.
3. Life skills enable individuals to translate knowledge, attitude and values into actual abilities i.e. what to do and how to do it, given the scope and opportunity to do so.
4. Life skills however are not a panacea of **“how to do abilities”** as they are not the only factors that affect behaviour. There are many factors such as social support, culture and environment that affect motivation and ability to behave in positive ways.

5. Effective acquisition and application of Life Skills can influence the way one feels about others, ourselves and will equally influence the way we are perceived by others. It contributes to perception of self confidence and self esteem.
6. Life skills for psychosocial competence needs to be distinguished from other important skills that young people will acquire as they grow up such as reading, numbers, technical and livelihood skills.
7. Life skills education involves a dynamic teaching process. The methods used to facilitate this active involvement includes working in small groups and pairs, brainstorming, role plays, games and debates.
8. We all use Life Skills in different situations such as:
 - a) To negotiate effectively at home, school or work place, we need to have thinking skills as well as social skills
 - b) When faced with difficult situations we tend to think critically , to analyze all the pros and cons of the situation to think out of box to find a solution to seemingly difficult problems.
9. Many life skills are required to manage a particular situation effectively. In a way, various Life Skills work best in conjunction. In fact, the appropriate combination of Life Skills in a given moment is an art.
10. Children learn their Life Skills from parents, teachers and significant others who act as their role model. They gradually learn to use a particular skill effectively in diverse situation to cope with challenges of life.

“We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the foundation of life. Many of the things we need, can wait. The children cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made and his senses are being developed to him we cannot answer “Tomorrow”. His name is “Today”.

-Gabriela Mistral, 1948