

Life skill education and its Importance at secondary stage

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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.

World Health Organization suggested ten Life Skills for the well balanced physical and Mental growth of the adolescents.

Decision making helps us to deal constructively with decisions about our lives. This can have consequences for health if young people actively make decisions about their actions in relation to health by assessing the different options, and what effects different decisions may have.

problem solving enables 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.

Creative thinking contributes to both decision making and problem solving by enabling us to explore the available alternatives and various consequences of our actions or non-action. It helps us to look beyond our direct experience, and even if no problem is identified, or no decision is to be made, creative thinking can help us to respond adaptively and with flexibility to the situations of our daily lives.

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

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, but also needs and fears. And it may mean being able to ask for advice and help in a time of need.

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.

Self-awareness includes our recognition of ourselves, of our character, of 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 also often a prerequisite for effective communication and interpersonal relations, as well as for developing empathy for others.

Empathy is the ability to imagine what life is like for another person, even in a situation that we may not be familiar with. Empathy can help us to understand and accept others who may be very different from ourselves, which can improve social interactions, for example, 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.

Coping with emotions involves recognising emotions in ourselves and others, being aware of how emotions influence behaviour, and being able to respond to emotions appropriately. Intense emotions, like anger or sorrow can have negative effects on our health if we do not react appropriately.

Coping with stress is about recognising the sources of stress in our lives, recognizing how this affects us, and acting in ways that help to control our levels of stress. This may mean that we take action to reduce the sources of stress, for example, by making changes to our physical environment or lifestyle. Or it may mean learning how to relax, so that tensions created by unavoidable stress do not give rise to health problems. The life skills described above are dealt with here in so far as they can be taught to young people as abilities that they can acquire through learning and practice. For example, problem solving, as a skill, can be described as a series of steps to go through, such as: 1) define the problem; 2) think of all the different kinds of solutions to the problem; 3) weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of each; 4) chose the most appropriate solution and plan how to realise it.

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. . 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 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
- ⌚ Small groups
- ⌚ Educational games and simulations
- ⌚ Case studies
- ⌚ Story telling
- ⌚ Debates
- ⌚ Decision mapping or problem trees

IMPORTANCE OF IMPARTING LIFE SKILLS:

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. 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.

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“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”

Thanks

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