

Introducing Life Skills through Activities

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Abstract

Life skills are essentially those skills that help promote the overall well-being and competence in young people as they face the realities of life. We all use life skills in different situations, such as to negotiate effectively at home, school or workplace. When faced with difficult situations, we tend to think critically, analyse all the pros and cons of the situation, think out of the box to find a solution to seemingly difficult problems. Children learn their life skills from parents, teachers and significant others who act as their role model. That is why, the Life Skills Programme—a school-based programme, is imparted in different schools. This paper highlights the various classroom activities that must be practised and encouraged for understanding life skills better.

INTRODUCTION

Life skills are the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.

–World Health Organization

Life skills are a group of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop

coping and self-management skills to lead a healthy and productive life.

NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF LIFE SKILLS

Life skills are needed for the following reasons.

- To develop a dynamic self-image and great self-esteem
- To make relationships and handling interpersonal problems, better

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- To help one in dealing with the challenges of the everyday life
- To reduce vulnerability and improve utilisation of protective factors
- To enable the youth to adapt to situations and people

Life skills can be understood to include the following.

L — Learning

I — Identity and self-awareness

F — Fitness and health

E — Emotional development

S — Solving problems

K — Kindness

I — Intimacy

L — Living in balance

L — Letting go and holding on

S — Social skills

LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION IN THE CLASSROOMS

The Life Skills Programme is a school-based programme where life skills are imparted in a supportive learning environment. The programme is for the promotion of health and well-being among all the children. The Life

Skills-based Education refers to an interactive process of teaching and learning which enables the learners to acquire knowledge and to develop attitudes and support the adoption of healthy behaviour. Life skills are not a substitute to any type of education, training or organisational system but are complementary. These skills can be inculcated among students. Here, the author has suggested some of the activities for the development of life skills in students.

The World Health Organization has laid down 10 core life skills (Table 1).

Cognitive Domain

Creative thinking

It implies not just being artistic and innovative. It is a state of mind which could be applied to any situation. It is the ability to accept change and newness, a willingness to play with ideas and possibilities, a flexibility of outlook, the habit of enjoying the good, while looking for ways to improve it. Creative thinking when applied to one’s life, would involve looking for novel ways to resolve the

**Table 1
Life Skills Identified by WHO**

Cognitive Domain	Affective Domain	Psychological Domain
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative thinking • Critical thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-awareness • Empathy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective communication • Interpersonal relationship • Decision making • Problem solving • Coping with emotions • Coping with stress

conflicts and challenges that one may be faced with.

Activity

Situation—Winters are over and you want to pack your woollen clothes in a bag. Now, as there are too many clothes, you are unable to close the bag and you do not want to remove anything due to some reasons. How would you close the bag and pack all the clothes?

Activity

Looking at problems and situations differently—Step 1. Tell the participant that it is time for another interesting exercise. Make nine dots on the flipchart as shown in the figure below. Ask the participants to draw four straight lines through the nine dots without retracing and without lifting their pen from the paper.

Step 2. Give five minutes to the participants to do this exercise, and then ask them to share their drawings. Applaud those participants who could make the drawing as per the stated instructions above.

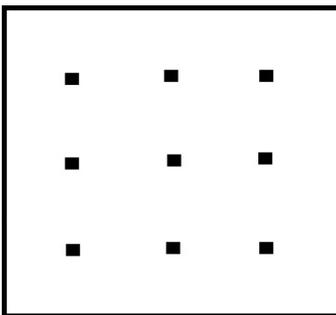


Figure 1

(*Hint*—Tell the participants that the key to the solution is that the imaginary boundaries formed by the dots need not to be observed. Once freed from this restriction, it is easy to find a solution.)

Critical thinking

It is the art of analysing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it. It is learning to think without a bias. It is a logically-reasoned judgment, where one thinks in the light of knowing. A critical thinker makes use of information to solve problems and arrive at meaningful conclusions. Critical thinking promotes creativity and is crucial for self-reflection. A critical thinker raises pertinent questions which are clear and precise, identifies the relevance and importance of ideas, understands the logical connections between ideas, examines beliefs, assumptions and options and weighs them against facts. It is a novel way of seeing or doing things and addressing issues.

Activity

We can motivate the students to think critically by asking the question ‘why’? Suppose if they are reading a chapter, then they should be motivated to think critically about the importance of reading that particular chapter. What is the relevance of that chapter? How can it help us in transformative learning? All of this is critical thinking which should be used to introspect and transform oneself.

Situation—Neha walks to her school daily. One day, a stranger woman offers to drop her by her car. Neha suspects her and thinks critically why the woman is interested in dropping her. She refuses to go with her. Later, she hears in the news that the same lady was arrested as she was running a brothel house.

This situation shows that we should critically analyse the strange things happening in our life.

Storytelling

Step 1. Ask one participant to read aloud the story—The Cap Seller and the Monkeys, to all the students. Tell the participants that the objective of this exercise is to learn more about life skills from the story of a man. Applaud the participant who narrates the story.

The Cap Seller and the Monkeys

Once there was a cap seller in a town. On one day, after he sold a few caps, he became very tired. He decided to take rest for a while under a big tree. Soon, he dozed off.

There were many monkeys on the big tree. They saw that the cap seller was sleeping under the tree. The monkeys were sitting on the top of the tree. They came down, took the caps from the cap seller's bag and wore them. Then they climbed the tree again.

When the cap seller woke up, he was shocked to see his basket empty. He searched for his caps. To his surprise, he saw that the monkeys

were wearing them. He asked them to give the caps back. But the monkeys ignored him. He grew angry and picked up some stones and threw at them. In return, the monkeys also plucked fruits and bombarded on him. Suddenly, an idea struck him. He found that the monkeys were imitating him. So, he started throwing his cap down and the monkeys also did so. The cap seller collected all the caps, put them back in his basket and went away happily.

Step 2. Ask the participants the following questions and initiate a discussion.

- What problems did the cap seller face while trying to get back the caps from the monkeys?
- What were the thoughts and feelings of the cap seller?
- What did the cap seller do to find a solution?

Step 3. Explain to the participants that critical thinking helps us to make important decisions. It helps us to ask important questions such as—what options do I have, what can each option lead to, is this really what I want, etc.

Step 4. End the session by emphasising on the key message—critical thinking helps us to analyse what is at stake. It draws us towards the wishes and motives of ourselves and others and why we react the way we do.

Affective Domain

Self-awareness

It includes our recognition of ourselves, our character, strengths, weaknesses, desires and dislikes. It can help us to recognise when we are stressed or feel under pressure. It is often a pre-requisite for effective communication, interpersonal relationship and developing empathy for others'.

–World Health Organization

Activity

Write about 'Myself'

In this activity, a person can write about one's strengths and weaknesses. In doing so, one will have to introspect oneself. The students can be given some questions to encourage them to introspect about themselves.

- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- How do your friends describe you? Do you agree with their description? Why or why not?
- What are your dreams and fears in your life? Why?
- What type of activities did you enjoy doing when you were a child? What about now?
- When you disagree with someone's viewpoint, what would you do?

An interesting way to become self-aware is to use the Strength-Weakness-Opportunity-Threat (SWOT) analysis which actively promotes the identified strengths,

minimises weaknesses by presenting them in a planned way, exploit the opportunities before the window closes and have contingency plans in place to minimise threats before they materialise.

Empathy

It is the experience of understanding another person's condition from their perspective. When we understand ourselves as well as others, we are better prepared to communicate our needs and desires. It is the skill that plays a role in building relationships, creating love, strengthening bonds, promoting peace and making communication effective.

Activity

Choose 10 participants and distribute them 10 chits with different emotions written on each. This could include happiness, frustration, sadness, anger, shock, shyness, jealousy, guilt, irritation and fear. Ask them to enact their emotion one by one. Instruct others to identify the emotions by their facial expressions. The basic idea is that by looking at the facial expressions or body movements of another, or by hearing their tone of voice, one may get an immediate sense of how they feel. It is necessary to understand others' feelings and emotions and to empathise with them. The ability to be empathetic conveys that we are understanding, responsive, concerned, respectful and trustworthy.

Activity

Bring sufficient number of newspapers or magazines for the class and distribute among the students along with a sheet of paper, glue stick and scissors. Instruct the students to cut pictures of people expressing any kind of feeling, and to use these images to build a Collage of Feelings. Ask them to label each picture in their collage with a term that represents a feeling and then invite the students to explain their collages and the particular term that they have given to the images. Encourage the students to elaborate on the details of what they have noted regarding the person's facial expression, their body language, or the context of the photo or illustration.

Psychological Domain**Effective communication**

It means that we are able to express ourselves, both verbally and non-verbally, in ways that are suitable to our cultures, societies and situations. This means being able to express ideas, opinions, feelings, needs or fears appropriately. Always communicate tactfully.

T—Think before you speak

A—Assertive communication

C—Clarity of Thought and Content

T—Tone and Pitch of voice

F—Focus on interests, needs of the listener

U—Uncover hidden feelings

L—Listen for feedback

Activity

Role play can be used to understand effective communication. It can be better understood by this example.

Scene—Mayank's House

A friend of Mayank's mother enters Mayank's house.

Mrs. Sharma—Mayank, is your mother at home?

Mayank—No aunty, she has gone to school. She will come in the evening.

Mrs. Sharma—Inform your mother that there is a party tomorrow.

Questions to be asked and discussed are as follows.

- What message is given in the above conversation?
- Is the message meaningful?
- What are the drawbacks in the message?
- What is the correct way of giving the message?
- What should have Mrs. Sharma confirmed?

By discussing these questions, one can draw conclusion about the importance of effective communication.

Interpersonal relationship

Interpersonal skills help us to interact and relate effectively with others in our society. This enables us to build and maintain friendly relationships which can be of great importance to our mental and social well-being. Respect, responsibility, understanding, co-operation, caring and effective communication are the

factors which contribute to building healthy relationships.

Activity

The following activity can help in understanding and developing interpersonal relationships.

Step 1. Ask the participants to name different relationships (child-parent, teacher-student, employer-employee, father-mother, brother-sister, grandparent-grandchild, friends, etc.)

Step 2. Discuss what makes a relationship successful. Write down their responses on the flipchart (respect, dependability, honesty, caring, understanding, etc.).

Step 3. Divide the participants into pairs and assign them each a relationship as named above in step 1. Ask them to prepare a role play that will demonstrate the qualities of the relationship assigned. Have each pair act out their role play for the whole group, and then discuss the following.

- What are some of the actions and words in the role play that illustrated various elements of respect, understanding, care and responsibility?
- What other actions or words could be added to this role play to show this quality?

Step 4. Facilitate a discussion using the following questions.

- Which of the qualities discussed are the most important to us?
- How do we put these qualities into our relationships?

- How would we feel about a friend, who did not respect us, who did not put much effort into the relationship? What could we do?
- How would we feel if a parent or guardian did not understand us? What would we do to improve the relationship?

Step 5. Ask the participants to describe and give examples of unhealthy or bad relationships. Write their responses on a flipchart. Explain that these are the opposite of what makes a fulfilling relationship—disrespect, fear, lack of understanding, lack of care, irresponsibility, dishonesty, lack of proper communication, etc.

Step 6. Discuss the importance of respect, responsibility, trust, understanding and care in making a relationship.

Decision making

It is the ability of assessing an issue or situation by considering all the possible and available options, and the effects those different decisions might have on them. It helps us to deal constructively with issues and decisions about our lives. It can be regarded as an outcome of the mental processes leading to the selection of a course of action among several alternatives.

Activity

Situation — Pooja is a student of Class X. She wants to continue her Class XI with physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics as her subjects. But her present school is

offering her only computer science. The school which offers her the needed subjects is around 15 km away but with a direct bus service. Her friends plan to continue in the same school. Now, help Pooja in making a decision.

Providing students with similar situations can help them to act wisely and make the right decision.

Problem solving

It is the ability to understand what the goal of the problem is and what rules could be applied to represent the key for solving that problem. This means being able to deal with problems constructively in our lives. This skill not only empowers a person to control and solve one's problems, but can also turn them into opportunities.

Activity

Situation—Fourteen-year-old Neha shared her laptop with her close friend without taking permission from her parents. Now, her friend is not returning it. When Neha asks for her laptop, her friend repeatedly refuses to return, by giving various reasons. What should Neha do?

Various situations can be given to students and they can be motivated to solve their problems by thinking critically.

Coping with emotions

It means the ability to recognise emotions within ourselves and others, being aware of how emotions influence our behaviour and being able to respond to the emotions appropriately. Intense emotions like

anger or grief can have negative effects on one's well-being if we do not respond appropriately. Coping with our emotions helps us to express our feelings productively, express difficult feelings without attacking the self-esteem of the person, prevent feelings from building up and fostering into a bigger problem and communicate difficult feelings in a manner that minimises the other person's need to become defensive, and increase the likelihood that the person will listen.

Activity

Step 1. Discuss what it means to be disappointed and ask the participants to state at least three disappointing events they have experienced recently. For example,

- getting rejected by someone you really like
- not getting the expected results after putting in one's best efforts in that task
- having to go somewhere you do not want to go

Step 2. Ask the participants to explain how they responded to the disappointment. Did they yell, cry, argue, blame someone else, or made some other responses?

Step 3. Ask them to identify who they think is to be blamed for their unhappiness or their disappointment—themselves or someone else. Ask them to share some examples of situations, reactions, and who they think is to be blamed.

Step 4. Explain the unhappy feelings that come from our thoughts by taking

one situation as an example and identifying the thoughts surrounding it. For example, if a youth is upset about being rejected by a girl or boy one really likes, one would likely be saying or thinking something like the following.

- How can one be so mean, so cruel?
- This is unfair.
- Am I that bad that I cannot attract and sustain a relationship?

Step 5. Discuss whether or not the person really has to think and feel this way. Show that the same person may feel entirely different if the person thought the following.

- The other person was not really mean; instead the person just said that they were not interested.
- Perhaps the person loves someone else.
- I deserve someone better.

Step 6. Initiate a discussion on the following questions.

- Is it really possible for someone else to be responsible for your unhappiness or happiness?
- Where do happy or unhappy feelings come from?

Step 7. Sum up the activity by explaining that happiness or unhappiness is a state of mind. Therefore, the real source of these lies in the mind, not in external circumstances. It is the way we think about the circumstances that make us feel happy or unhappy.

Coping with stress

It means recognising the sources of stress in our lives, how this stress affects us, and trying to find ways that help us control our levels of stress, by changing our lifestyles and the environment around us. Some sources of stress are related to self-esteem, employment, financial independence, educational and career decisions, etc. Also, some sources come from family environment like inadequate family relationships, lack of communication, parental criticism, authoritarian parental style, family disruption, loneliness, etc.

Activity

Group discussion

Make five groups and ask them to do the following.

- Make a list of things which cause stress.
- As an individual, what will help you to reduce stress? Make a list.
- Each group leader will give a presentation of the list of things which cause stress, and suggestions to reduce stress.
- Write down the alternatives suggested by the teacher to reduce stress.

SOME MORE TECHNIQUES TO ENHANCE LIFE SKILLS IN STUDENTS

Class Discussion

It is a participatory learning technique in which the class examines a

problem of interest with the goal of understanding an issue or skill better, reaching the best solution, or developing new ideas and directions for the group.

Brainstorming

It is a technique for generating new ideas and suggestions on a particular topic. The main objective of brainstorming is to generate multiple ideas. Evaluating or debating the ideas occurs later.

Role Plays

It is an informal dramatisation in which people act out a suggested situation.

Small or Buzz Group

For small group work, a large class is divided into smaller groups of six or less students and given a short period of time to accomplish a task, carry out an action, or discuss a specific topic, problem or question.

Games and Simulations

Educational games can be used for teaching content, critical thinking, problem solving and decision making and for review and reinforcement. Simulations are activities structured to feel like the real experience.

Situation Analysis and Case Studies

Situation analysis activities allow the 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.

Debate

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.

Storytelling

The students tell or read a story to a group. Pictures, comics and photo novels, filmstrips and slides can supplement. Students are encouraged to think about and discuss important points or methods raised by the story after it is told.

Life skills education is a value-based programme which aims to provide students with strategies to make rational decisions that contribute to a meaningful life. In order to ensure quality education, there is a need to include parents, teachers and children in the life skills education, because it can help to improve the well-being of individuals. The daily activities in our life can provide a better understanding of life skills education, which in turn would make people more responsible and cooperative. Thus, providing life skills education contributes to the development of the nation and its social well-being.

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