

## Introduction to Life Skills

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*“Life skills education is designed to facilitate the practice and reinforcement of psychosocial skills in a culturally and developmentally appropriate way; it contributes to the promotion of personal and social development, the prevention of health and social problems, and the protection of human rights.”*

This statement is the product of a United Nations Inter-Agency Meeting held at WHO headquarters in Geneva on 6-7 April 1998. The aim of the meeting was to generate consensus among United Nations agencies as to the broad definition and objectives of life skills education and strategies for its implementation, in order to facilitate collaboration between the various organizations working to support the advancement of life skills education.

There are different reasons for teaching these life skills. In the United Kingdom, an important life skills initiative was set up to contribute to child abuse prevention, and in the USA there are numerous life skills programmes for the prevention of substance abuse and violence.

Many countries are now considering the development of life skills education in response to the need to reform traditional education systems, which appear to be out of step with the realities of modern social and economic life in the twenty first century. Problems such as violence in schools and student drop-out are crippling the ability of school systems to achieve their academic goals. Furthermore, in addition to its wide-ranging applications in primary prevention and the advantages that it can bring for education systems, life skills education lays the foundation for learning skills that are in great demand in today's job markets especially after globalization and post-recession scenario where survival is the key.

Keeping this in view the Ministry of Human Resource Development has launched the Adolescent Education Program (AEP) with the objective of providing adolescents with authentic knowledge about the process of growing up during the period of adolescence. Inter alia, the program aims to enhance the Life Skills in adolescents.

Defining life skills, “Life Skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that will enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.”

Below is a list of 10 life skills to help students succeed in life, and not just in academics.

**Self-Awareness** includes knowing our *Self*. In a nutshell, what our strengths, weaknesses, likes and dislikes are. This gives us the ability to identify and work on our areas of improvement. It also enables us to empathize with others.

**Empathy** - To have a good and balanced relationship with our loved ones at all levels and be sensitive to other people's needs, desires and feelings. Empathy is the ability to imagine what life is like for another person. It helps us inculcate a feeling of tolerance to accept others, who may be very different from ourselves. This helps in improving social interactions, especially, in situations of ethnic or cultural diversity.

**Critical Thinking** enables students to analyse information and experiences in an objective manner. It helps them recognize and assess the factors that influence attitudes and behaviour, such as values, peer pressure and the media.

**Creative Thinking** and its introduction is basically to develop out of the box thinking and do away with patterned or stereotype mindset which has no place in the new century.

**Decision Making** helps students deal constructively with decisions about their lives. It teaches them to actively take decisions about their actions in relation to healthy assessment of different options and, to analyse the effects these different decisions are likely to have.

**Problem Solving** equips students to deal with problems in their lives. This skill enables them to deal with the problem in a scientific manner and teaches them to develop a mindset devoid of negative thoughts.

**Interpersonal Relationship** helps students to relate in positive ways with people. It focuses on the ability to nurture relations and in case of conflict, opt out gracefully.

**Effective Communication** would mean empowering the student with the ability for expressing verbally and non-verbally, opinions and desires, and also needs and fears. And it may mean being able to ask for advice and help at the time of need.

**Coping with Stress** teaches 4 skills: identifying the factors that lead to stress, their impact on health and relationships with people, minimising those factors and strategies for coping with stress.

**Coping with Emotions** means identifying positive and negative emotions within us and in others. Self-control in terms of negative emotions is what this skill teaches the students.

Effective acquisition and application of life skills can influence the way we feel about ourselves and others, and will equally influence the way we are perceived by others. Life skills contribute to our perceptions of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem.

However, I would like to state very emphatically that life skills education would give results only if the following things listed below are taken into consideration.

1. Even before a child enters school, life skills have to be taught at home especially by parents and elders in the family.
2. Teachers have to first teach life skills and then design activities to ensure that objective assessment is done without a bias. They should also ensure that an index is developed to map the implementation of these skills in the students.
3. The teaching of life skills at school have to be super imposed at home. Without the support from the family members, the schools per se would not be able to generate the desired results.

So let's partner together to impart these skills and bring about a change in the life and personality of children we are raising in the twenty first century.

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