

Life Skills (Meaning, Need and Importance) (Individual Activity)

Life Skills

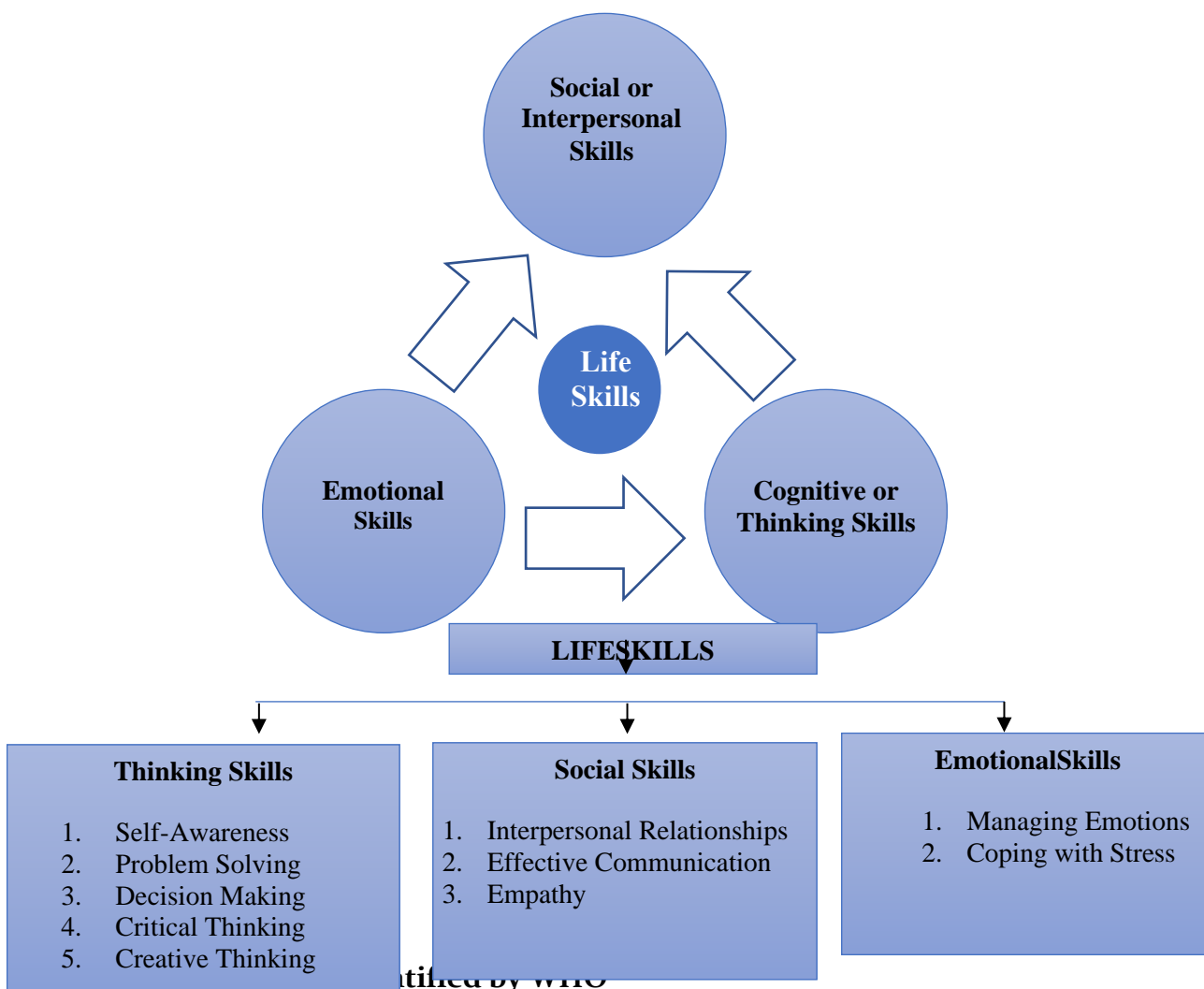
Life Skills are defined as *“The abilities that will help learners to be successful in living a productive life. They help students improve their personal and social qualities”*.

WHO (1997) has defined Life Skills as, *“The abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable the individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”*.

Here '**adaptive**' means that a person is flexible in approach and is able to adjust indifferent circumstances and '**positive behaviour**' implies that a person is forwardlooking and even in challenging situations, can find a ray of hope.

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 manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner.

Life Skills fall into three basic categories which compliment, supplement and reinforce each other:



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

Empathy is required to develop a successful relationship with our loved ones and society at large. It is the ability to imagine what life is like for another person. Without empathy, our communication with others will amount to a one-way traffic. It 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 diversities. Empathy can also encourage nurturing positive 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 a well balanced way of life 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 others' ideas).

Decision Making helps us to deal constructively with decisions about our lives. It can teach people how to actively make decisions about their actions in relation to a 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 skills help us to relate in positive ways with people we interact. 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 maintaining good relations with family members who are the most important source of social support. It may also mean an ability 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 would also mean being able to ask for advice and help in the time of need.

Coping with Stress means recognizing the sources of stress in our lives, recognizing how they affect us, and how we act in a way that helps us control our levels of stress by changing our environment or lifestyle, and learning how to relax.

Managing Emotions means 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 don't respond to them appropriately.

(The definitions of the ten Life Skills as mentioned above have been adapted from "Life Skills Education for Children and Adolescents in Schools"- Programme on Mental Health, World Health Organization, Geneva, 1997)

All these skills are interrelated and reinforce each other. Together, they are responsible for our psychosocial competence; build our self-esteem and self-efficacy and nurture holistic development.

HOW DO LIFE-SKILLS HELP?

Thinking Skills	Social Skills	Emotional Skills
Thinking skills help a person to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrate the ability to be original, imaginative and flexible	Social-skills help a person to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrate the ability to identify, verbalize and respond	Emotional Skills help a person to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify causes and effects of

- Raise questions and think critically, identify and analyse problems
- Implement a well thought out decision and to take responsibility
- Feel comfortable with one's own self at the same time accepting or trying to overcome weaknesses while building on the strengths for positive self-concept

- effectively to others' emotions in an empathetic manner**
- **Get along well with others without prejudices**
- **Take criticism constructively**
- **Listen actively**
- **Communicate effectively using appropriate words, intonation and body language**

- stress on oneself**
- **Develop and use multi-faceted strategies to deal with stress**
- **Express and respond to emotions with an awareness of the consequences**

Importance of Life Skills for students

Many research studies have demonstrated that Life Skills Education is very effective in:

- Promoting positive attitudes and behaviours among the young adolescents
- Improving communication abilities
- Promoting healthy decision making
- Preventing negative and high risk behaviours
- Promoting greater sociability
- Teaching anger control
- Increasing self-esteem and self confidence
- Improving academic performance

Well designed and well delivered Life Skills Programme can help young adolescents become more responsible, healthy and resilient both during adolescence and adulthood.

Life Skills Development (Individual Activity)

Ouane(2002) says "*Life Skills are developed as a result of a constructive processing of information, impressions, encounters and experiences, both individual and social that are part of one's daily life and work, and the rapid changes that occur in the course of one's life*".

Life Skills Development is a life-long process that helps individuals grow and mature; build confidence in one's decisions taken on the basis of adequate information and thought, and discover sources of strength within and outside. It is noteworthy that, from times immemorial, every culture and society has invested in educating and empowering its younger generation to lead fulfilling and responsible lives. For example, the '*Panchatantra*' stories from India have very important lessons in Life Skills enhancement that remain relevant to all generations.

The Life Skills Program can be effectively provided to young adolescents by teachers, peer educators, parents, counselors, psychologists, health workers and social workers.

All these program providers or facilitators of Life Skills Education should

- Be warm, caring, supportive and enthusiastic
- Be resourceful
- Be competent enough to guide and counsel students effectively
- Have adequate knowledge about adolescence
- Be positive role models for the students

No doubt transacting Life Skills Education is a challenging job but it is rewarding. Schools play an important role in transacting Life Skills Education because the traditional mechanisms for passing on Life Skills are no longer adequate.

Therefore, the schools are an appropriate place for the transaction of Life Skills Education. Life Skills Programme can be infused in other school subjects and it can also be introduced as a new subject.

While transacting Life Skills Education, students should be actively involved in a dynamic teaching-learning process. The emphasis should be on those teaching learning experiences that promote '*experiential learning*' because Life Skills cannot be learnt in abstract and theoretical way. So the critical components of this type of education are participatory and interactive teaching learning methods.

Greene (2003a) suggests a teacher should imagine, reflect and act with more and more concrete responsibility. The teachers should not merely prepare Life Skills lessons but they should be prepared and planned as a part of unified and sequential programme which promotes psychosocial competence and mental health of the young adolescents.

It is rightly said by Albert Bandura, "*When people mentally rehearse or actually perform modeled response patterns, they are less likely to forget them than if they neither think about them nor practise what they have seen*". So the teachers and facilitators can make use of real life activities, worksheets and assignments, simulation, drama, brainstorming, situation analysis, relaxation exercises, games and many more such interactive and participatory techniques to transact Life Skills Education. It is by participating in such learning activities that young adolescents learn to manage themselves, their relationships and their health related decisions.

It is advisable that whatever methods a teacher or facilitator chooses, they should be learner centred, i.e. based on the particular needs, developments and interests of the learners and help bring about positive behavior change.

Characteristics of a Classroom environment supportive of Life Skills Education

- Reflections of real life situations and contexts
- Collaboration among teachers, disciplines and students
- Encouragement of curiosity, exploration and investigation
- Responsibility for learning opportunities
- Acknowledgement of effort, not just performance
- Focus more on process than product or final presentation

The role of teachers and facilitators in developing Life Skills differs from traditional instruction in their being a guide and friend to facilitate learning. The following **behaviours** promote Life Skills Education Development:

- Requiring justification for ideas and probing for reasoning strategies
- Confronting learners with alternatives and thought provoking questions
- Asking open ended questions
- Serving as a master of apprentices rather than a teacher of students as in vocational education
- Using Socratic discussion techniques, enquiry and debate to stimulate critical thinking
- Assigning simple assignments and projects based on Life Skills
- Treating Life Skills as an independent subject as well as integrating it with other disciplines
- Providing opportunities for developing Life Skills
- Allowing students to practise the skills in different situations, as actual practice of skills is a vital component of Life Skills Education
- Seeking cooperation and participation of parents in developing right attitudes towards life among the students, as family is also one of the basic institutions that lay the foundation of Life Skills
- Acting as positive role models, as Life Skills are better caught than taught.

The schools should promote Life Skills Education by:

- Creating a friendly, supportive, stimulating and structured learning environment
- Catering to the needs of all the students
- Promoting mutual respect and individual empowerment
- Encouraging collaboration among teachers and students
- Strengthening community action by involving parents and outside agencies in schools.

Life skills are part of everything that learners do and they can be part of everything they learn. Schools should provide settings for enhancing these skills through ***experiential learning experiences***.

