

Life Skills

Here are two sessions that you can use to explore the life skills we have, and those that help us develop. Session 2 follows on from Session 1, but can be done at a later time.

Session 1: Exploring life skills

Expected outcomes

Become aware of the life skills that the participants possess and use in their day-to-day lives. Participants will know about life skills and their use in day-to-day life.

What skills do I have?

Objectives:

- To explore the concept of life skills.
- To know the life skills used by the participants in their day-to-day lives.

Materials: Flash cards, markers, flip charts, gum/ tape.

Time: 1 hour.

Process

Invite the participants to sit in a circle. Ask them if they have heard of the term “life skills”? What do they know about it?

Explain that all of us possess certain skills that allow us to live our lives. Life skills are essentially the abilities that help promote mental well-being and competence and help us to face the realities of life. A very simple example is, the skill to write, work with others or make a decision. Explain how the World Health Organization (WHO) categorizes life skills in three components.

Pass out one flash card to each participant, and ask him/her to write the most important skill he/she possesses. Allow the participants five minutes to do this exercise.

Invite the participants to display their cards on the floor. Ask them to group similar cards. Ask if the cards represent most of the skills required for leading a healthy and productive life. If not, ask them to add the remaining skills.

While the participants are busy doing their work, prepare three flash cards with the headings – “All of us have”, “Some of us have” and “None of us have”. After the participants finish writing and grouping the flash cards, ask them to arrange the flash cards in a horizontal line on the floor.

Place the three cards, which you have prepared, in a vertical line next to the horizontal line of cards. Once this is done, you should be able to draw a matrix of rows and columns by moving the horizontal cards.

You should have four rows and as many columns as there are skill cards. Now, ask the participants to start from the top and fill the matrix. Move from the left to the right.

Once the matrix is complete, ask the participants to discuss the reasons for its outputs. For example, why is it that only some people have certain skills, and why are certain skills absent? Request volunteers to copy the matrix onto a chart, and put it up on the wall.

Summarise and close the discussion by using the WHO definition of life skills.

Notes for the facilitator

This simple exercise creates a mutual understanding of the concept of life skills and ascertains the level of life skills available within the group. The WHO categorisation of life skills is given at the start of the module. This categorisation can be used to summarise the exercise and as a handout.

WHO definition of Life Skills: The abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life

WHO categorises life skills into the following three components:

1. Critical thinking skills/decision-making skills:

Includes decision-making/problem-solving skills and information-gathering skills. The individual must also be skilled at evaluating the future consequences of their present actions and the actions of others. They need to be able to determine alternative solutions and to analyse the influence of their own values and the values of those around them.

2. Interpersonal/communication skills

Includes verbal and non-verbal communication, active listening, and the ability to express feelings and give feedback. Also in this category, are negotiation/refusal skills and assertiveness skills that directly affect our ability to manage conflict. Empathy, which is the ability to listen and understand the needs of others, is also a key interpersonal skill. Teamwork and the ability to co-operate include expressing respect for those around us. Development of this skillset enables the adolescent to be accepted in society. These skills result in the acceptance of social norms that provide the foundation for adult social behaviour.

3. Coping and self-management skills

Refers to skills to increase the internal confidence, so that the individual believes that they can make a difference in the world and effect change. Self esteem, self-awareness, self-evaluation skills and the ability to set goals are also part of the more general category of self-management skills. Anger, grief and anxiety must all be dealt with, and the individual learns to cope with loss or trauma. Stress and time management are important, as are positive thinking and relaxation techniques.

Session 2: What use are life skills?

Expected outcomes

Participants will understand why life skills are critical for a healthy and productive life.

Analysing the matrix

Objective: To learn about the importance of life skills in our lives.

Materials: The matrix from the previous exercise, flip charts, markers.

Time: 45 minutes.

Process

Ask the participants to take the matrix chart and place it on the floor. Invite the participants to divide into three groups:

1. Communication/interpersonal skills group.

2. Decision- making/critical thinking skills group.

3. Coping/self-management skills group.

Ask the three groups to look at the matrix and record the skills pertaining to their group.

Explain the task to the groups as follows:

- Discuss and list the benefits of possessing the life skills that have been noted by each group.
- Discuss and list the problems we would face if we not have these life skills.

Then, ask the three groups to sit in three different locations. Give them flip charts and markers. Allow 30 minutes to do this exercise.

Invite the groups to display their work and make presentations. Encourage discussion and cross questioning in the groups. Summarise and close the exercise by emphasising the importance of life skills.

Note for the facilitator

This useful exercise emphasises the utility and importance of life skills. You can repeat the information given for Session 1 at the beginning of this session if you are running it at a different time.

Point out why life skills are important for young people. Make special mention of their importance in empowering young people to take positive action to protect themselves and to promote health and positive social relationships. Emphasise the importance of life skills in the prevention of drug abuse, social violence, and teenage pregnancy, and in relation to protection against HIV/AIDS and STIs. Discuss their place in consumer education, environmental education, peace education, and education for development, livelihood and income generation among others.

You can present the list of the ten core life skills as classified by UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO. These life skills include problem solving, critical thinking, effective communication skills, decision making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness-building skills, empathy and coping with stress and emotions.