

LIFE SKILLS

THRIVING INDICATORS



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Life Skills

The Importance of Life Skills

Life Skills is one of five thriving competencies, that together, determine one's ability to accomplish what is needed to interact effectively with people and institutions.¹ It's important that teens develop an array of life skills to help them succeed in everyday situations.²

Life Skills can be grouped into overarching categories. The list below, informed by the youth development organization, 4-H, provides some specific examples of skills that vary by age, in terms of relevance and teachable moments. A twelve year-old, for instance, may not be interested in the skill of resume-writing, but should know how to answer the phone appropriately and maintain good hygiene.³

Nuts and Bolts of Managing and Organizing

- Earn, manage and share money wisely (e.g., open bank account, deposit checks)
- Manage time and commitments well
- Keep track of and organize possessions
- Develop Goal Management (GPS) skills: Goal selection, Pursuit of strategies, and Shifting gears in face of challenges
- Navigate physical environment using maps or transportation

Nuts and Bolts of Living

- Shop and cook healthfully
- Maintain good hygiene & appearance

- Home care, which includes maintaining a clean and safe environment.
- Emergency response skills

Nuts and Bolts of Working

- Participate on a team
- Seek and apply for a job
- Dress for & behave well in an interview
- Oversight of long-term assignments/projects
- Make appointments

Nuts and Bolts of Communicating

- Communicate well through phone, internet and in person
- Write thank-you notes
- Introduce self & others

Helping Youth Develop Life Skills

A youth might not be motivated to develop some task-oriented life skills, such as learning phone communication skills or how to read a map, if these skills feel uninteresting or irrelevant to his or her current life. As a mentor, consider a youth's motivation and a timely approach for teaching skills. Use strategies that help youth see the importance of the specific skills so that they buy-in to the learning process. For instance:

1. Connect the life skill to the youth's Spark. For instance, if the Spark is theater and the youth needs to improve organizational skills, help the youth develop an organization and tracking system for theater-related materials.
2. Incorporate a life skill goal into another meaningful goal. Goal management research shows that when

goals are complementary, such that working towards one goal helps you make progress towards another goal, motivation actually increases and goals are more likely to be achieved.⁴ Help youth piggyback a life-skills goal on to another thriving goal. For example, if the youth has a social skills goal of making new friends, but struggles with personal hygiene, help the youth see how improving hygiene ties to progress towards making friends.

3. Make the life skill relevant to the youth's life. A youth might not understand why it's important to know how to write thank you notes, or save money in a bank account. As a mentor, you can help the youth understand the importance by relating the effort to the youth's personal values, problems that can be averted, or long-term goals. Help the youth visualize someone who would benefit from this skill and doesn't have it, and someone else who takes advantage of this skill in his or her life activities.

Build Life Skills by Actively Involving Youth in Making Decisions:

"Jane was a thirteen year old who loved cooking and eating. To help Jane develop life skills, as well as other areas of competence, Jane's mentor suggested that Jane cook dinner for the two of them. This required Jane to read cookbooks, write a shopping list, and figure out when and how to get to the store. She had to ask for help to find what she needed at the store, determine how much to buy, and pay for the groceries, making sure she got the correct change.

Jane then followed instructions in the cookbook, with the help and encouragement of her mentor, and prepared a simple and delicious meal. After enjoying the rewards of her hard work, she cleaned up after herself, another life skill. In this process, the mentor nourished Jane's Spark, helped her develop the life skills of planning, taking transportation, cooking, eating healthfully, spending money and cleaning, developing her confidence along the way."⁵

References

1. Lerner, Richard M., (2007) *The Good Teen*. New York: The Stonesong Press, LLC.

Footnotes

1. Lerner, Richard M., (2007) *The Good Teen*. New York: The Stonesong Press, LLC. p. 47.
2. Lerner, Richard M., (2007) *The Good Teen*. New York: The Stonesong Press, LLC. p. 66.
3. Lerner, Richard M., (2007) *The Good Teen*. New York: The Stonesong Press, LLC. p. 66.
4. Freund, A., & Riediger, M. (2009, June 18); Interference and Facilitation Among Personal Goals: Differential Associations With Subjective Well-Being and Persistent Goal Pursuit. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 20, No. 12, pp. 1511.
5. Lerner, Richard M., (2007) *The Good Teen*. New York: The Stonesong Press, LLC. p. 68