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## Life Skills: Concept and Effectiveness for Developing of Mental Health During Pandemic

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### **Abstract:**

*'Education' is important, but education to support and live life better is more important. It has been felt that life skills education bridge the gap between basic functioning and capabilities. It strengthens the ability of an individual to meet the needs and demands of the present society and helps in dealing with critical situations and issues in an effective manner. Now a days, the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has become a global burden disrupting peoples' quality life. Students being an important cohort of a country and their mental health during this pandemic has been recognized as concerning issue. Through this article, we can understand the concept of Life Skills and it helps us to understand how it will help to improve the mental health of a student to cope up with these stressful situations in a positive manner.*

**Keywords:** Life Skills, Mental Health, Pandemic

### **Introduction:**

We usually say that we are educated. But when we are asked what is Education, we often confuse it with schooling, which is basically a narrow idea, generally being confined with the concept of educational institutions, teachers, students, curriculum and all. Some prefixed plan have been drawn up by others to drill learning to pupils according to that particular plan. But real education is not as simple as that.

Education is an essential tool that imports knowledge to improve one's life. It is a key process that plays a significant role in moulding the ethics and culture of a society. Education forms a distinct line of separation between man and other creatures by making man the smartest animal on earth. It empowers and readies us to face the challenges of life more effectively, enables one to stand

on one's own legs, to equip themselves for the struggle of life. Additionally education improves one's skills, abilities, knowledge, attitude and personality.

Now if we come to the context of Life Skills, it can be said that life skills are some abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable human to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of life. Basically this is the motto of real education, to prepare someone for coping up with struggling situations and to get success. These skills can't be acquired only by degrees.

### **What is Life Skills:**

According to WHO, Life Skills are defined as –“a group of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, emphasize with others, and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner. Life skills may be directed toward personal actions toward others, as well as toward actions to change the surrounding environment to make it conducive to health.” Bearing the WHO definition in mind, we can say that these skills offer people the emotional, social and intellectual tools needed to achieve success in life – on a personal level, an interpersonal level, and within their community and work places.

The ten core Life Skills as proposed by the WHO are essential skills for all individual to face the challenges of living and maintain mental equilibrium. These life skills have to imported to every child or adolescent during the educational period in schools and colleges and if we'll go through these skills once, they are –

#### **1. Problem Solving :-**

The individual should know the steps in problem-solving i.e. understanding the nature of the problem, its onset, factors which aggravate the problem, different solutions and how to choose the best.

#### **2. Decision Making:**

Before taking a decision, one has to list the pros and cons, loss and the gain, the risk involved. One need not hesitate to consult with the appropriate people.

#### **3. Creative Thinking :**

One should be innovative and creative; explore new ideas & methods.

#### **4. Critical Thinking:**

One has to learn to evaluate and critically look at an issue, information situation or requirement or recommendations made by others. One should not blindly accept or get carried away by other's statements or pressures.

#### **5. Self Awareness:**

It is very necessary to have an insight into self, one's capabilities, and limitations. One's strength's & weaknesses.

Appropriate Self Esteem should be present. Both Inferiority & Superiority feelings about self are harmful.

#### **6. Empathy:**

One should understand others views, experiences & expressions with sympathy. One should put himself in other shoes and react.

#### **7. Interpersonal Relationship :**

One should develop the skills of establishing and maintaining an appropriate, friendly relationship with most of the persons, one should also learn skills to manage hostile and troublesome persons by keeping the required distance.

#### **8. Good Communication:**

Good Communication Skills verbal & non-verbal are very important in the day-to-day functioning of the individual. Communication of feelings and emotions is essential for mental well being.

#### **9. Management of Stress:**

Appropriate & Healthy Methods of managing one's stresses go a long way in the prevention of physical and mental disorders.

#### **10. Management of Emotions:**

Appropriate & Healthy Methods of managing one's negative emotions go a long way in the prevention of physical and mental disorders.

Life Skills has been classified into three broad categories –

#### **Thinking Skills :**

Thinking skills are the skill that enhances the logical faculty of the brain using analytical ability, thinking creatively and critically and developing problem -solving skills improving decision – making abilities.

#### **Social Skills:**

Social skills include interpersonal skills, communication skills, leadership skills, management skills, advocacy skills, Co-operation and team building skills etc.

#### **Emotional Skills:**

Emotional skills, involves knowing and being comfortable with oneself. Thus self management, including managing/coping with feelings, emotions, stress and resisting peer and family pressure.

#### **Who Requires These:**

It is applicable for everyone (from children to adults) who wants to achieve a quality personal life. Sometimes we get confused in our life and unable to find an appropriate solution in respect of that problem. But these skills provides readily available tools to deal with challenges/demands of

daily life by managing our emotions and by making informed decisions. It also helps to develop children's personality, talents, mental and physical abilities and realize their true potential through learning to know oneself and make effective decisions to live harmonically together in the society.

### **What is Mental Health:**

Mental Health, usually refers to cognitive, behavioural and emotional well being of a person. It is app about how we think, feel and behave. It can preserve a person's ability to handle stress and to enjoy life. It involves to reach the balance between life activities, responsibilities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience.

We all know that Health is Wealth. Health is basically the state of being free from injury or illness. We generally consider these injury and illness for our physical health only, which are visible to all. But what about our mental health injury? These injuries should be handled more carefully and more sensitive manners as they are not visible from outside.

### **Covid – 19 and Our Mental Health:**

Stress, depression, loneliness, fear, trauma, negligence, worry – these are some common factors that may affect people's mental health. Though we are given advice all the time not to worry, not to fear, always to be cheerful and happy etc. But after all we are human being. Sometimes, some situations in our life come such a stressful way which can't be avoided. As a result may be we get recovery from our physical illness but our mental health can be affected which are most of the time ignored. Undoubtedly the effects are not always bearable. Nowadays we all are going through such real threats, experiencing the fear of Covid – 19 pandemic.

It's not just a medical phenomenon. By spreading rapidly, this deadly virus affects individuals as well as society and causes disruption, anxiety, stress, stigma and fear of death. For breaking the chain of the virus, we all are bound to maintain social distancing and keep ourselves isolated. This isolation may protect our health but it affects badly to our mental health. Quarantine, self isolation, separation from loved ones, loss of freedom, boredom and uncertainty can cause a determination in our mental health status. Both children and adults are experiencing a mix of emotions in this current global situation. Every person's daily routine has been changed in this sudden 'New Normal'. Some typical terms like 'Online Class', 'Work from Home' etc. become common for all. But these sudden changes for indefinite time period is literally a punishment for all. Some common changes in children's behaviour in this time are –

- Excessive crying and annoying behaviour
- Increased sadness and depression
- Difficulties with concentration and attention
- Addiction towards online games etc.

Besides, some common changes in adults behaviour are also noticeable. These are –

- Irritating and shouting behaviour
- Lack of patience
- Change in their sleeping and eating habits
- Emotional outbursts etc.

### **Literature Review:**

There are a lots of researches we can find in support of the importance and effectiveness of life skills for developing students' social, emotional as well as mental health development

- According to Allbertyn et al. (2004) proved in his study that life skills training enhance critical thinking abilities, which further impacts were living life actively, being responsible in the job and in future planning too.
- Ramesh and FarshadC. (2004) highlighted the effectiveness of life skills training in increasing mental and physical health, pro social behaviour and decreasing in behavioural, social problems and Self-destructive behaviours.
- Smith & et al., (2004) noted significant improvement in interpersonal relationship and reduction in aggression and behavioural problems.
- Tuttle et al., (2006), proved the effectiveness of life skills by adding it with students' curriculum. The results of this study suggested the outstanding capability of teenagers to promote positivity and flexibility.
- Vranda and Rao (2011) proved that life skills training enhanced their psychosocial competencies.
- Puspakumarag(2013) snowed in his study that life skills training was effective in preventing a wide range of problems such as substance abuse, teenage pregnancies, violence, bullying and to promote self confidence and self esteem among adolescents.
- Roodbari& et al., (2013) in their research showed that life skills training has a positive effect and improves social development, emotional and social adjustment, suggesting an increase in compatibility of children and public health.

### **Life Skills and Mental Health Development:**

Research shows that supportive relationships and feelings of connectedness to fellow students, family, friends, faculty members and mentors are protective factors that can help to promote emotional well being. So it is important to deploy some ways to implement a comprehensive approach during this pandemic –

### **Support the Development of Life Skills:**

We have all needed to adapt to new circumstances in our daily lives because of the COVID-19 outbreak. That includes everything from commerce to our careers, but we can still support

children, teens and young adults in managing friendships and relationships, problem solving, decision making, and identifying and managing emotions in this new paradigm. You should emphasize that students are not alone and provide guidance and mentorship for anything in your realm of expertise: study skills, time management or handling anxiety related to new digital learning and communication formats. Faculty members can create virtual drop-in opportunities during the week for students to discuss problems or concerns around coursework, study, academic or other challenges.

During this vulnerable time, it becomes imperative to understand the importance of human values like compassion, empathy, patience, optimism among others. These quintessential virtues, not always found in textbooks, can help students comprehend why a concept like social distancing is necessary and garner sympathy for those who are Unwaveringly working to tackle the pandemic such as health care professionals. This can be made possible, specially to children, through limited exposure to fact-based and neutral news as well as simplified videos, especially ones highlighted good deeds.

Effort must be made to educate both the heart and the mind. Children, at home can be encouraged to participate in easy household activities or learn a new skill to understand values like teamwork, involvement and collaboration. Assigning them tasks can also impart a sense of Independence, responsibility and accomplishment.

#### **Promote social connectedness:**

The need to remain physically distant doesn't have to mean a loss of social contact. Encourage the teens and young adults to nurture their friendships and remain in communication with their classmates. Some avenues for strengthening social connectedness might include online study groups or online study/accountability partners. Students might be able to stay engaged with extracurricular clubs and affinity groups online, as well as participate in school/college-sponsored online social activities. Faculty mentors may also be available to support students virtually.

#### **Identify students at risk:**

Schools/Colleges must to be poised to identify students at risk for mental health problems and/or suicidal behaviour, as well as to promote emotional health awareness among those people who interact with students most frequently, from faculty members to other students. When communicating with students via phone, email, text or on social media platforms, faculty members and administrators can employ principles of active listening. If a student expresses a concern, try to listen carefully at three levels: the content of what they are saying, the emotions they are feeling and their behaviours in response to those thoughts and feelings.

Ensure that faculty members and students know where to refer students or whom to contact if a student expresses thoughts or behaviours that are concerning or worrisome. In addition, colleges

can offer tips and suggestions to parents and families for how they can recognize if their children are struggling and best offer support.

### **Increase help-seeking behaviours:**

Students who need help but are reluctant or unsure of how to get it may find it even more difficult now to reach out and access care. In this new environment, counselling centres can open a virtual discussion group, specifically for students to talk about what's going on and how they feel. Know where to refer students for support or other resources.

### **Counselling for Parents:**

Besides parents are suggested to spend more and more time with their children. Children need more and more attention and care during this critical time. By involving in different healthy exercises and indoor games and activities, following a schedule/routine and taking a break from traditional and social media, can help to overcome mental health issues. They should carry more and more patience to understand their child's problem.

### **Conclusion:**

Promotion of mental health deserves a high place in our present scenario. As like any other health concern, it's better to take prevention measures in mental health too. Life skills modify behaviour by converting what we know and what we think/feel/believe into what to do and how to do. It helps to develop and enrich our mental health in such a manner so that we can fight in tough and stressful situations. In our today's restricted daily life, promoting these skills in an effective and sensitive manner will help students to fight back with their stress and emotional disruptions. We are vaccinated to prevent Corona. We have to realize that life skills are such type of vaccines which will prevent a children's mental disorders and will support them to cope with their struggle in a stress free manner.

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