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Swati Negi
MSc Nursing, Nursing Tutor,
Department of Mental Health
Nursing, Ganga Sheel School
of Nursing, Bareilly,
Uttar Pradesh, India

Alan Bharti
MSc Nursing, Assistant
Professor, Department of
Community Health Nursing
Kritika Nursing College,
Uttar Pradesh, India

Life skills education: Enhancing adolescent mental health

Swati Negi and Alan Bharti

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Abstract

Adolescence is a critical stage of development marked by rapid physical, cognitive, and emotional changes. During this period, adolescents face social pressures, identity challenges, and new responsibilities, which may lead to stress, anxiety, or behavioural issues if unaddressed. The objective is to highlight the importance of life skills education in promoting mental health among adolescents and the role of nurses in facilitating skill development. A narrative review of literature from 2017 to 2023 was conducted, examining life skills components, developmental significance, and classroom integration strategies for adolescents.

Life skills interventions enhance emotional regulation, coping, problem-solving, decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and resilience. Classroom strategies such as role plays, discussions, and group activities effectively foster these skills. Nurses support adolescents through assessment, education, counselling, and evaluation of life skills programs. It is concluded that integrating life skills into school and community settings is essential for adolescents' mental well-being, resilience, and holistic development, enabling them to navigate real-life challenges confidently.

Keywords: Life skills, adolescence, coping strategies, mental health

Introduction

Adolescence is a critical stage of human growth characterized by rapid physical, cognitive, and emotional development. During this period, individuals experience new responsibilities, social pressures, and identity challenges. If not handled properly, these experiences may lead to emotional distress, anxiety, or behavioural issues. Mental health problems in adolescence often begin subtly and, if ignored, can progress into serious psychological conditions in adulthood.

Life skills education provides a constructive framework to help adolescents face these challenges. It enhances their capacity to handle stress, make thoughtful decisions, and maintain emotional balance. Life skills not only contribute to improved academic and social performance but also strengthen psychological resilience and promote long-term mental well-being.

Importance of life skills

Life skills are not optional, they are essential for survival, success and wellbeing in the 21st century. They empower individuals to think independently, adapt to change, manage emotions, and interact harmoniously with others. For adolescents, life skills provide a protective shield against stress, peer pressure, and risky behaviours, while fostering confidence, empathy, and resilience. In the era where academic scores often take precedence, life skills bridge the gap between knowledge and its real-life application. They prepare young people not just to earn a living but to live meaningfully, building healthy relationships, making ethical choices, and contributing positively to society.

Need of Life Skills

According to United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2023), India boasts the world's largest adolescent population, with approximately 243 million individuals aged 10-19, accounting for nearly 20% of the population ^[1]. Globally 1 in 7 adolescents faces mental health issues ^[2]. A 2024 survey found 53% of Indian youth are "personality malnourished" - lacking resilience, social values, and coping skills. Student's suicide exceeds 13,000 annually and a 61% rise among female students ^[3]. These figures alone are not enough. Life skills build competencies that enable individuals to effectively manage the

Corresponding Author:
Swati Negi
MSc Nursing, Nursing Tutor,
Department of Mental Health
Nursing, Ganga Sheel School
of Nursing, Bareilly,
Uttar Pradesh, India

demands and challenges of daily life. The World Health Organization (WHO) identifies ten core life skills including self-awareness, critical thinking and stress management that are crucial for healthy development and social adaptability. Equipping adolescents with these skills not only enhances academic performance but also fosters resilience, social responsibility, and preparedness for adulthood.

Global Scenario

Life skills education has been recognized worldwide as an important component of adolescent development. WHO was the first organization to formalize the concept of life skills education in 1990s through its framework “Life Skills Education for Children and Adolescents in Schools” This framework has been adopted by more than 40 countries worldwide. International Organizations like UNESCO and UNICEF suggest that life skills should be included not only in school education but also in community programs [4]. Many countries have institutionalized life skills as part of their school curriculum. For example, Finland’s education system embeds social and emotional learning across all subjects [5]. Australia’s National Safe Schools Framework incorporates resilience and relationship skills into classroom teaching [6]. These global efforts tell a common reality: academic knowledge is no longer sufficient for success. Equipping adolescent with life skills prepares them for ever-changing world.

Indian scenario

India, with 243 million adolescents, has been promoting life skills education through national and state programs. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and WHO guidelines introduced life skills into school curriculum. National initiatives such as the

Adolescent Education Programme (AEP) and the Rastriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) use a life skills approach to address health, gender, and behavioural issues. Successful models include Delhi’s Happiness Curriculum (benefiting over 1.6 million students) and Tamil Nadu’s Thalir Thiran Thittam (covering 39,000+ schools). However, many states have yet to adopt or fully implement life skills programs, leading to uneven coverage. Parents often prioritize academic achievement over holistic development, overlooking the role of life skills in mental health, social competence, and employability. Addressing these gaps is essential to prepare India’s youth for real-life challenges.

Goal

To highlight the importance of life skills education in strengthening the mental health of adolescents and to emphasize the role of mental health and psychiatric nurses in promoting these skills through education and practice.

Methodology

This article is a narrative review of existing literature on life skills education. Studies between 2017 and 2023 were examined to identify the key components of life skills, their developmental significance, and strategies for implementation in educational settings.

Review of literature

The topic has attracted considerable attention from researchers, theorist, and practitioners alike. Numerous studies have highlighted the value and impact of life skills education in enhancing student’s social, emotional, and cognitive development, as well as in helping them address various psychosocial) and issues.

Table 1: Review of Related Literature

Sr. No.	Author	Year	Title	Key Findings	Implications
	Sherif Y, Azman AZF, Awang H, Mokhtar SA, Mohammad Zadeh M, Alimuuddin AS [7]	2023	Effectiveness of Life Skills Intervention on Depression, Anxiety and Stress among Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Review	Systematic review of 10 experimental and quasi-experimental studies (n=6,714) found that life skills interventions effectively reduce depression, anxiety, and stress among adolescents.	Confirms that life skills programs are evidence-based tools for improving adolescent mental health across diverse populations.
	Dr. Puja Tripathi & Dr. Ritu Dabral [8]	2023	The Role of Life Skills in Promoting Mental Health and Reducing Anxiety Among Adolescents	The study used a mixed-method approach to assess life skills such as emotional regulation, coping strategies, self-efficacy, and social skills among adolescents aged 10-19. Findings revealed up to 35% reduction in anxiety and 40% improvement in emotional regulation following life skills interventions.	Highlights that structured life skills programs significantly reduce anxiety, improve self-confidence, and should be incorporated into school curricula to promote adolescent mental health.
	Deepa Sikand Kauts and Jaspreet Saini [9]	(2022)	A systematic narrative review on life skill-based education	Parents and teachers can promote life skills through daily activities; prepares children for real world challenges.	Reinforces ear
	Ms. A. Smith [10]	2018	Awareness of life skills among post graduate students	Parents and teachers can promote life skills through daily activities; prepares children for real-world challenges.	Reinforces early awareness and continuous development of life skills.
	Ravindra Prajapati et al. [11]	(2017)	Significance of Life Skill Education	emphasized that integrating life skills education into everyday school activities, facilitated by trained educators or counsellors, is essential for promoting student’s psychological wellbeing	Demonstrates practical approach to implementing life skills in schools.

Understanding Life skill and Different Ways to develop them
According to WHO,

“Life skills as the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life” [12]

Table 2: Ten essential Life Skills as per WHO

Sr. No.	Life Skill	Definition	Ways to develop them
1.	Self-Awareness	Self-awareness means being attentive. It is the skill to understand one's own emotions, physical sensations, behaviour and thought patterns.	- Practice Self-Reflection - Get feedback at work - Mindfulness and Meditation - Identify Your Strengths and Weaknesses - Set Personal Goals - Monitor Your Self-Talk - Keep a diary - Accept yourself
2.	Effective communication	Effective communication is when both parties have exchanged information at a time when they are both open to share ideas, thoughts and feelings	- Participate in group discussion and role plays. - Practice active listening and assertive communication - Engage in debates and communication - Learn nonverbal communication - Use "I" statement to express thoughts
3.	Interpersonal Relationship	Interpersonal skills also known as social skills which enable you to communicate, interact, and build relationships with others.	- Involve in group projects and team games - Practice active listening more than speaking - Learn to respect different views - Role-play social situations to improve communication - Accept feedback positively
4.	Empathy	It means being able to understand how another person feels and looking at situations from their point of view.	- Practice Active Listening - Try to imagine how you would feel if you were in their situation. - Show Kindness and Compassion - Reflect on Your Own Emotions Understand your own feelings to better understand others'.
5.	Creative Thinking	Creative thinking is the ability to think in a new, original and imaginative ways.	Thinking out of the box inventing a new product, writing a story or poem, designing a logo or poster, etc
6.	Critical Thinking	Critical thinking is the ability to analyse information logically, evaluate evidence, and make reasoned judgments. Analysing facts before making judgments	- Ask questions like: Why? How? What if? - Analyze both sides of an issue
7.	Decision Making	Involves the selection of a course of action from among two or more possible alternatives in order to arrive at a solution for a given problem	- Practice small decisions daily (e.g., time management, healthy choices). - Think before acting - avoid rushing. - Discuss choices and consequences with peers or adults. - Reflect on past decisions - what went well or wrong? - Use tools like pros and cons.
8.	Problem Solving	Problem solving means finding out what the problem is, understanding why it happened, thinking of different ways to fix it, choosing the best way, and then using it to solve the problem.	- Discuss problems and solutions with peers or mentors. - Stay calm under pressure - focus on finding solutions, not just the issue. - Learn from mistakes and try different approaches when one doesn't work
9.	Coping With Stress	Coping with stress is about recognizing the sources of stress in our lives, recognizing how this affects us, and acting in ways that help to control our level of stress.	- Practice Relaxation & Exercise Regularly - Talk About Your Feelings - Manage Time wisely. - Get Enough Sleep 7-9 hours of quality sleep help the mind and body recover - Avoid Harmful Coping Methods Say no to alcohol, smoking, or overeating as stress relievers
10.	Coping with Emotions	It is the skill of dealing with emotions by understanding them and expressing them without harm to yourself or others.	- Recognize and Name Your Emotions - Express Emotions & take time - Practice Relaxation Techniques - Use Positive Self-Talk - Seek Support When Needed

Imparting Life Skill Education In classroom

Life skills must be incorporated into the school curriculum which will lead to positive outcome. Below are some effective classroom strategies to enhance life skills among students.

- **Classroom talks:** It helps them learn how to listen well, speak clearly, understand others' feelings, and work together.
- **Brainstorming:** Think of many possible ideas
- **Role Play:** Students act out different situations, like

how to say no to peer pressure or how to solve a conflict.

- **Group Work:** It encourages effective communication and Good Inter-personal relationship
- **Games and Simulations:** Enhance verbal and nonverbal communication skills

Role of Nurses in Promoting Life Skills

Psychiatric and mental health nurses are uniquely positioned to teach, guide, and evaluate life skill development. Their

role includes:

1. **Assessment:** Identifying adolescents with poor coping or communication skills.
2. **Education:** Conducting interactive sessions on stress management, problem-solving, and self-awareness.
3. **Counselling:** Helping adolescents apply life skills to handle real challenges.
4. **Collaboration:** Working with schools, families, and community workers to reinforce learning.
5. **Evaluation:** Monitoring emotional and behavioural improvement after life skill interventions. In community and school settings, nurses act as facilitators who promote both mental health and personal growth.

Conclusion

Life skills are the foundation of sound mental health. They help individuals understand themselves, relate positively to others, manage emotions, and handle challenges effectively. By improving coping abilities, enhancing emotional regulation, and encouraging problem-solving, life skills education plays a vital role in preventing mental health issues and promoting overall psychological well-being.

When life skills are integrated into daily learning and personal growth, adolescents develop resilience, confidence, and a positive attitude toward life. In this way, life skills become not only tools for survival but also keys to a healthier and happier mind.

Conflict of Interest

Not available

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Not available

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