



Miracle Foundation

Life Skills Education

Trainer Procedures

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A family for every child, in our lifetime.

Purpose of Life Skills Education

Life skills refers to a large group of psychosocial and interpersonal skills that promote mental well-being and lead to a healthy and productive life. The World Health Organization (WHO 1993) defines life skills as “the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.”

- Life skills **develop competencies** and actual **behaviors**
- Life skills **address the whole individual** and therefore can lead to overall, sustained life-long behavior change
- Life Skills **empower children and young adults**

Why Do Children Need Life Skills?

Life Skills are critical for children. Life Skills lead to behavior change. The life skills approach declares that if children and young people are provided with the opportunity to learn skills in a supportive environment, they can confidently manage their lives in a positive manner while serving as valuable resources to their friends, family and community.

- **Knowledge is not enough.** Experience indicates that building awareness and providing knowledge is not enough to influence behavior. Although people may understand risk, they may not make rational decisions to change their behavior to reduce these risks.
- **Knowledge must impact attitudes and values to change behavior.** Attitudes and values influence our behavior. Life Skills activities provide opportunities to reflect on one’s beliefs and attitudes. These efforts, when encouraged in a supportive environment, lead to changes in behavior.

Information

+

Skills

+

Motivation

+

Supportive
Environment

= Safe, Healthy Choices

What are the Core Life Skills?

Miracle Foundation’s Life Skills Education (LSE) Program is based upon the core set of life skills as identified by WHO (1994) for the promotion and well-being of children and adolescents. The practice of these life skills leads to an increased sense of competence and positive changes in behavior. **The ultimate goal for our children is greater confidence and self-esteem, a healthy, positive lifestyle, and the ability to become self-sustaining citizens of the world community.**

The curriculum developed by Miracle Foundation (Miracle) is designed to teach the following core life skills as defined by WHO. **All life skills are interrelated.**

| Core Life Skills | | |
|---|--|--|
| Social Skills | Thinking Skills | Emotional Skills |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Awareness – recognition of our character, unique attributes, and values • Empathy – ability to be sensitive to another person’s situation • Communication Skills – ability to express clearly and listen carefully using verbal and non-verbal communication • Interpersonal Relationship Skills – relate to people in a positive way, make and maintain friendly relationships, and end relationships constructively | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem Solving – process of working through details of a problem to reach a solution • Decision Making – process of selecting a logical choice from the available options • Critical Thinking – ability to analyze information and experiences in an objective manner; recognize and assess the factors that influence attitudes and behavior • Creative Thinking – explore available alternatives and various consequences of our actions/non-actions. Look beyond our direct experience and respond with flexibility to situations in our daily lives even if no problem is identified | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coping with Stress – recognize source of stress in our lives, how it affects us, way to control levels of stress • Coping with Emotions – recognize emotions within us and others, being aware of how emotions influence behavior |

Core Life Skills are also applied to **specific risk situations** (e.g. responsible sexuality, preventing abuse) within Miracle Foundation’s Life Skills Education curriculum to prevent unhealthy or risky behavior.

The following are **NOT Core Life Skills**, but are essential as well, and many are covered in the Life Skills Education curriculum:

- Livelihood Skills – Applying for a job, managing time, work habits, vocational skills, etc.
- Daily Living Skills – Managing personal finances, preparing meals, banking, post office, using transportation, going to a health center, etc.
- Learning Skills – How to read/write, math, hobbies, drawing and crafts, study skills, etc.
- Health Skills – Brushing teeth, first aid, ORS, road safety, making nutritious meals, etc.
- Survival Skills – How to seek police help, where to go in emergency, contacting helplines, etc.

Understanding Miracle’s Approach to Learning Life Skills

The six steps of Miracle Foundation’s approach to learning life skills are as follows:

1. **Understanding** the issues and life skills needed
2. **Relating** issues to the children’s own lives
3. **Practicing** skills in a safe and supportive environment
4. **Applying** life skills in real-life situations
5. **Reflecting** on experiences
6. **Strengthening** life skills for further use

Life Skills are learned in special ways – the **process** of learning life skills is as important as learning its **content**. Developing new skills is initially difficult and requires a great deal of perseverance and support. It is important for each learner to be able to practice new skills and must have opportunities to receive feedback and reflect on how to improve their newly acquired skills.

Active Methods lead to active learning. “The most effective method of skill development is *learning by doing*, by involving people in active, participatory,

learning experiences rather than passive ones.” (Source: Information Series on School Health Document 9, Skills for Health, Pg. 30. WHO, UNESCO, UNICEF, THE WORLD BANK 2000)

Active Learning Methods

**Games | Role Play | Storytelling | Art Activities |
and More...**

Miracle Foundation Life Skills Education Program

It is important for children to **learn a few relevant skills and learn them well**, rather than trying to absorb numerous new concepts quickly. Besides, it’s not easy for children to learn new behavior (some learning requires “unlearning” as well). They need time to practice new skills and should not be rushed.

- **This program contains a number of units, each focusing on one Life Skill**, and each broken into parts with activities from which to choose.
- Each unit is divided into sessions for particular **age groups** (ages 5-8, 9-12, 13+)
- The **number of units per age group varies** as the sessions have been designed to meet the needs and developmental level of the children. The youngest group will receive training on only the very basic skills.
- Each unit offers some **options in activities** so that the trainer can chose the exercise that best meets the needs of their group, and to allow for a selection of exercises in the event the unit is repeated with the same group of children in the future.
- A variety of **follow-up activities** are also included in each unit; they may be assigned as homework and discussed in the weekly session, or they may be completed in the follow-up session.

Preparing for Life Skills Education

Each child should receive a Life Skills Education **folder/binder** in which to keep handouts, resource materials and follow-up assignments, and a **journal** in which to complete writing assignments.

The Trainer must prepare for each session by:

- **Reading** through the training materials
- **Reviewing** each step of the session
- **Selecting** activities from the options available
- **Organizing** handouts and resource materials
- **Testing** videos, movies, power points to ensure that they will be in working order at the home

Before conducting the session, the trainer needs to go through the unit and **understand the objectives and content** of each lesson. The trainer needs to take ownership of the content, **believe in it, know it, and love it**. The group should feel that the trainer is confident about what he/she is teaching.

The trainer needs to keep in mind that the time required for the activities is only an estimate; different groups may require varying times, so the trainer needs to **build in flexibility**.

Sessions must always be adapted to the children's needs. The sessions have been developed to adapt to the varying ages and developmental levels of the children, however the **trainer must be in tune with their group's life experiences and level of understanding**.

Facilitating the Life Skills Education Program

Arrange the children in a semi-circle or circle so they can interact with each other. The trainer may sit inside or just outside the circle. If the children are sitting on the floor, it is recommended the trainer do the same.

The following are some basic trainer guidelines:

- Learn the **children's names** and use them often
- **Greet every child** warmly as they arrive
- **Speak** loudly, clearly, and at the children's level of understanding

- **Create a supportive atmosphere** where children feel free to ask you questions and share their ideas. This starts with your tone of voice , your smile, your eye contact, and your active listening skills
- Stop the lesson at appropriate times to give the children **time to think and absorb and ask questions**
- **Check in with children** to ensure they are understanding the material
- **Move around, be animated**
- Use **everyday examples** to make a point
- **Involve every member** of the group
- Keep **water and snacks** accessible and available

A selection of **energizers and ice breakers** have been included in every unit to help the children become comfortable and ready to learn. It is recommended that a warm-up activity and review of what happened that week begin each weekly follow-up session as well.

A frequent **review of “group rules”** as established in the first unit will be beneficial to creating a supportive and comfortable environment for all. However, participants who break the ground rules should be reminded about the breach in a fun or kindly manner, rather than being humiliated. If you as the trainer single out children with criticism it will set the tone of the group and make the participants reluctant to speak up.

The **trainer is encouraged to use life skills** in all of their interactions with the children, enabling them to observe these life skills in practice and internalize their use.

The units incorporate a **variety of techniques** in order to make the exercises and activities interactive, challenging and fun. The trainer should refer to the end of this document for descriptions and examples of some techniques that are utilized in the units.

Discussion and review of thoughts, experiences, and learning must follow the activities. The broad review questions that are provided are meant to remind the trainer of issues that should be discussed.

The children are provided the opportunity **try out their new skills** in real life simulations and gradually add on more skills. The trainer guides the children as they review their new skills, discussing what behavior they were able to apply or

found difficult to perform. Give feedback gently and **offer positive reinforcement** for participation in discussion and for all ideas.

Tips for Reaching the Youngest Children (Ages 5-8 years old)

This youngest group of children are being exposed to Life Skills Curriculum for the first time and may not be able to absorb all of the concepts right away. Our goal is to introduce them to the ideas; we will consider the training a success if they learn just a few of the concepts in the session, as they will be revisiting the topics numerous times in future years.

In addition to the trainer, **another adult** should be present to assist if the number of children is too large. Prior to the session, discuss with the adult who will be assisting that day the role you want them to play (e.g., assisting the trainer, encouraging the children, etc.).

It is critical that the trainer **maintains a positive tone, speaks to the children at their vocabulary level** and maintains their interest with **interactive demonstrations and lively practice sessions**.

Young children may have difficulty sitting still and being attentive for more than 20-30 minutes at a time, so **short breaks must be incorporated** into the session whenever the trainer observes the children becoming fidgety or losing attention. If they have been sitting the whole time you may want to suggest a **stretching break or some other physical activity**.

Enhancing the Use of Power Points

While power points can be a very effective tool to incorporate visuals in to the learning process, the following key points will enhance their value to the children:

- **Look at the children**, not the screen when imparting the material on the Power Point
- Do not read the screen or trainer notes word for word; **paraphrase using language appropriate to the level of the children**
- **Pause often** to allow the children to absorb the information, to ask questions, and to generate discussion

Follow-Up Activities

Each unit concludes with follow-up activities designed to provide **opportunity to review and practice material** between sessions. They are an integral and critical component in life skills activities and *must* be included in the training sessions.

- The follow-up assignment may be completed outside of the session and discussed during follow-up the next week, or it may be completed in the follow-up session.
- If the children are to complete the project outside of the session, assign the follow-up activity at the end of the session and provide clear instructions to the children regarding tasks and expectations. Explain that they will be discussing progress on the activity in the follow-up session in the next week.
- Each weekly follow-up session must **begin with feedback from the children** regarding what has happened since the last training session, recognition of their efforts, and a discussion of possible solutions to challenges they faced.

The Life Skills Education Program is **most effective when reinforced on a daily basis**. Parents/caregivers need to support the children's learning daily, and approach communication and conflicts using these same Life Skills, so they will need to be aware of the content of the training as well.

Building a Supportive Environment

Life Skills must be practiced and reinforced. Facilitators must build trust and provide a non-threatening environment. Because life skills lead to behavior change in real life situations, **the surrounding community also needs to be sensitized so that they can reinforce the positive behavior of children**.

- The caregiving team should **model appropriate behavior** and **offer encouragement, feedback, and direction** as they observe children applying new skills on a daily basis.
- Parents/caregivers can utilize journals to **make note of behavior changes** they notice in the children.

Rewards for Participation

In order to **encourage participation and motivate children to complete assignments**, rewards can be used from time to time.

Rewards can be given to recognize exceptional or increased participation, completion of follow-up assignments, well-maintained and complete folders, a positive attitude during sessions, etc.

They can include **stickers, certificates, candy**, etc. **Simple recognition in front of the group** can also work well. Keep in mind that the type of reward that is encouraging and motivates the children will vary based on their age and interests.

Evaluating the Program

Feedback from the participants and trainer is vital to ensuring that the Life Skills Education Program is delivering the desired material in a way that engages and reaches all children. A simple evaluation form is included at the end of each unit (as an Annexure) along with instructions for the trainer to provide to the participants. **The more specific the feedback, the more helpful it will be.** Trainer, please complete the form as well, indicating what worked well, or what modifications would be beneficial.

Facilitators should evaluate progress in follow-up sessions, particularly where growth in building a skill can be readily observed (e.g., role play, measuring success at reaching goal, etc.).

Miracle Foundation Life Skills Education Curriculum

| Unit # | Unit Name | Ages 5-8 | Ages 9-12 | Ages 13+ |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Unit 1 | Introduction to Life Skills Education | 5-8 | 9-12 | 13+ |
| Unit 2 | Self-Awareness | 5-8 | 9-12 | 13+ |
| Unit 3 | Goal Setting | | 9-12 | 13+ |
| Unit 4 Part I | Effective Communication | 5-8 | 9-12 | 13+ |
| Unit 4 Part II | Effective Communication | | 9-12 | 13+ |
| Unit 5 | Interpersonal Skills | 5-8 | 9-12 | 13+ |
| Unit 6 | Problem Solving and Decision Making | | 9-12 | 13+ |
| Unit 7 | Expressing Emotions | 5-8 | 9-12 | 13+ |
| Unit 8 | Stress Management | | 9-12 | 13+ |
| Unit 9 | Thinking Skills | | 9-12 | 13+ |
| Unit 10 | Study Skills | 5-8 | 9-12 | 13+ |
| | Caring for My Body | 5-8 | 9-12 | 13+ |
| | Nutrition | 5-8 | 9-12 | 13+ |
| | Responsible Sexual Behavior – Part I | | | 13+ |
| | Responsible Sexual Behavior – Part II | | | 16+ |
| | Abuse Prevention | | 10-12 | 13+ |
| | HIV/AIDS | | | 13+ |
| | Substance Abuse Prevention | | | 13+ |
| | Bullying is Never OK | 5-8 | 9-12 | 13+ |
| | Gender Stereotypes/Sensitization | | | 13+ |
| | Financial Training | | 9-12 | 13+ |

Trainer Techniques

| Technique | What it is | Notes |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| Verbal and non-verbal communication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective verbal communication – use of language that is simple, comprehensive, articulate and clear • Validating responses, reflecting emotions, clarifying queries and listening actively • Non-verbal communication – maintaining eye contact, body contact when appropriate, scanning and facing the entire group, being relaxed, smiling, nodding and being aware of negative facial expressions like staring or frowning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to the entire group, even if the issue being addressed has been raised by one person • Be ready to explain to the group as many times as required |
| Brainstorming | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires flip charts or VIPP cards, markers and pens • Generates ideas and is often used at the beginning of a session. • Involves asking a question and encouraging participants to share an idea that comes to their mind | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extremely useful as it brings up many different issues • Refrain from commenting on ideas raised • Do not exceed 10 to 15 minutes as boredom might set in |
| Small group discussion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted in smaller groups who then share their ideas with the larger group • Similar in process to brainstorming | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extremely useful in obtaining response that would otherwise not emerge in larger groups • Provides everyone in a small group the opportunity to share • Makes participants feel protected |
| Case studies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires pre-prepared scenarios or situations on paper | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages participants to apply their knowledge and skills to |

| | | |
|-------------|---|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illustrate types of behavior and encourages participants to analyze different behavior patterns • Facilitates critical analysis and discussion | <p>problems similar to those they actually face.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes participants feel protected • Allow participants sufficient time for reading • Include case studies that are relevant to group concerns and feelings |
| Discussions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involves talking about issues and exchanging ideas • Binds the group together • Allows individuals to share their ideas and feelings • Participants can share their work as well as challenger, alter or affirm the ideas of others • Conducted after individual or group activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strike a careful balance between intervening and 'taking a back seat' • Encourage participants to participate • Ensure that the discussions stay on track by drafting a set of relevant check questions interjected at appropriate moments • Maintain strict time limits • Remember that a productive discussion can be a short discussion |
| Visual aids | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires two-dimensional visual aids to communicate ideas and facts vividly • Very successful media of communication as vision is the most sensitive and helpful of all the five human senses • Used to bridge gaps between the facilitator and the participants • Relies primarily on written and spoken words, lines drawings pictures and symbols | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holds participant attention and creates interest in the subject • Visually depicts ideas that are abstract or difficult to understand • Gives clear explanations and information in a sequential and systematic manner. |
| Role plays | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involves reenacting of situations without a script | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective in understanding dynamics in |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maybe spontaneous or more structured with descriptions of the character's goals given to participants | <p>communication skills and trying out new behaviors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback should focus on which behaviors worked, which did not and why |
| Demonstrations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involves practicing skills and trying out new skills through short role play demonstrations • Allows for analysis and feedback on progress | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very useful in assessing participant progress • Encourages participants to critically evaluate behavior and situations |
| Experiential learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involves participants analysis of their own or other's experiences at any point • Focuses on key issues and real concerns of participants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often told from the first person perspective, this allows for sharing feelings and experiences, making connections that are critical to the growth process |
| Questionnaires and worksheets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires individual sets of pre prepared relevant questions for all participants and pens • Follows any format – objective, subjective, open ended, close ended – depending on purpose • Allows a participant to analyze responses in the light of the broader themes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective when dealing with sensitive and personal issues like sexuality • Include questions that are relevant to the issue being discussed • Stress on honest and confidentiality • Bring closure to the exercise by discussion the broader themes and objective of the exercise without probing for specific individual responses |