



# FLOW CHART

## Content Flow at A Glance Module 7: Life Skills

<b>Subject/topic/activity</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
Reading material on the basic concept of “life skills.”	To introduce the concept of “life skills” through a question answer section.	7-2 to 7-5
Exercise – What skills do I have?	To explore the concept of life skills in day-to-day life.	7- 6 to 7-7
Exercise – Analyzing the matrix.	To know the importance of life skills in our lives.	7-8 to 7-9
Exercise – Skills I need.	To learn about the essential skills required for protection against HIV/AIDS and STDs.	7- 10

# Module 7

## Life Skills

***“Know thyself”***

*Socrates*

### I What are Life Skills?

The World Health Organization has defined life skills as, “the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”.

UNICEF defines life skills as “a behaviour change or behaviour development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude and skills”. The UNICEF definition is based on research evidence that suggests that shifts in risk behaviour are unlikely if knowledge, attitudinal and skills based competency are not addressed.

Life skills are essentially those abilities that help promote mental well-being and competence in young people as they face the realities of life. Most development professionals agree that life skills are generally applied in the context of health and social events. They can be utilized in many content areas: prevention of drug use, sexual violence, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS prevention and suicide prevention. The definition extends into consumer education, environmental education, peace education or education for development, livelihood and income generation, among others. In short, life skills empower young people to take positive action to protect themselves and promote health and positive social relationships.

### II What are the Core Life Skill Strategies and Techniques?

UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO list the ten core life skill strategies and techniques as: ***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.***

Self-awareness, self-esteem and self-confidence are essential tools for understanding one’s strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, the individual is able to discern available opportunities and prepare to face possible threats. This leads to the development of a social awareness of the concerns of one’s family and society. Subsequently, it is possible to identify problems that arise within both the family and society.

With life skills, one is able to explore alternatives, weigh pros and cons and make rational decisions in solving each problem or issue as it arises. It also entails being able to establish productive interpersonal relationships with others.

Life skills enable effective communication, for example, being able to differentiate between hearing and listening and ensuring that messages are transmitted accurately to avoid miscommunication and misinterpretations.

### III What are the Main Components of Life Skills?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) categorizes life skills into the following three components:

**a) Critical thinking skills/Decision-making skills** – include 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 analyze the influence of their own values and the values of those around them.

**b) Interpersonal/Communication skills** – include 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 one's ability to manage conflict. Empathy, which is the ability to listen and understand others' needs, is also a key interpersonal skill. Teamwork and the ability to cooperate include expressing respect for those around us. Development of this skill set 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.

**c) Coping and self-management skills** refers to skills to increase the internal locus of control, so that the individual believes that they can make a difference in the world and affect 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 key, as are positive thinking and relaxation techniques.

**UNICEF promotes the understanding that the life skills approach can be successful, if the following are undertaken together:**

**a) The Skills** -This involves a group of psychosocial and interpersonal skills (described in section 3) which are interlinked with each other. For example, decision-making is likely to involve creative and critical thinking components and values analysis.

**b) Content** - To effectively influence behaviour, skills must be utilized in a particular content area. "What are we making decisions about?" Learning about decision-making will be more meaningful if the content is relevant and remains constant. Such content areas as described could be drug use, HIV/AIDS/STI prevention, suicide prevention or sexual abuse. Whatever the content area, a balance of three elements needs to be considered: knowledge, attitudes and skills.

**c) Methods** - Skills-based education cannot occur when there is no interaction among participants. It relies on groups of people to be effective. Interpersonal and

psychosocial skills cannot be learned from sitting alone and reading a book. If this approach is to be successful, all three components, life skills, content and method should be in place. This effectively means that life skills can be learnt through the use of certain methods and tools.

## IV Criteria for using Life Skills.

**U**NICEF identifies the following criteria to ensure a successful life skills-based education:

- It should not only address knowledge and attitude change, but, more importantly, behaviour change.
- Traditional "information-based" approaches are generally not sufficient to yield changes in attitudes and behaviours. For example, a lecture on "safe behaviour" will not necessarily lead to the practice of safe behaviour. Therefore, the lecture should be substantiated with exercises and situations where participants can practice safe behaviour and experience its effects. The adult learning theory emphasizes that adults learn best that which they can associate with their experience and practice.
- It will work best when augmented or reinforced. If a message is given once, the brain remembers only 10 percent of it one day later, and when the same message is given six times a day, the brain remembers 90 percent of it. Hence the need to repeat, recap, reinforce and review.
- It will work best if combined with policy development, access to appropriate health services, community development and media.

## V How can Life Skills Help Young People make Better Choices concerning their Health?

**D**eveloping life skills helps adolescents translate knowledge, attitudes and values into healthy behaviour, such as acquiring the ability to reduce special health risks and adopt healthy behaviour that improve their lives in general (such as planning ahead, career planning, decision-making, and forming positive relationships). The adolescents of today grow up surrounded by mixed messages about sex, drug use, alcohol and adolescent pregnancy. On one hand, parents and teachers warn of the dangers of early and promiscuous sex, adolescent pregnancy, STDs/HIV/AIDS, drugs and alcohol, and on the other hand, messages and behaviour from entertainers and peer pressure contradict those messages. Often, they even promote the opposite behaviour. It is through life skills that teenagers can fight these challenges and protect themselves from teenage pregnancy, STDs, HIV/AIDS, drug violence, sexual abuse, and many other health-related problems.

Hopefully, developing life skills among adolescents will empower girls to avoid pregnancy until they reach physical and emotional maturity, develop in both boys and girls responsible and safe sexual behaviour, sensitivity and equity in gender relations, prepare boys and young men to be responsible fathers and friends, encourage adults, especially parents, to listen and respond to young people, help

young people avoid risks and hardships and involve them in decisions that affect their lives.

## **VI What does Research say about the Outcomes of Life Skills-Based Education?**

**P**rogrammes aimed at developing life skills have produced the following effects: lessened violent behaviour; increased pro-social behaviour and decreased negative, self-destructive behaviour; increased the ability to plan ahead and choose effective solutions to problems; improved self-image, self-awareness, social and emotional adjustment; increased acquisition of knowledge; improved classroom behaviour; gains in self control and handling of interpersonal problems and coping with anxiety; and improved constructive conflict resolution with peers, impulse control and popularity. Research studies have also shown that sex education based on life skills was more effective in bringing about changes in adolescent contraceptive use; delay in sexual debut; delay in the onset of alcohol and marijuana use and in developing attitudes and behaviour necessary for preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS.

## Session 7.1

### Exploring Life Skills

#### Expected Outcomes

Peer Educator will become aware of the life skills that the participants possess and use in their day-to-day life.

Participants will know about life skills and their use in day-to-day life.

	<b>What Skills Do I Have?</b>
<i>Objective</i>	To explore the concept of life skills. To know the life skills used by the participants in their day-to-day life.
<i>Materials</i>	Flash cards, markers, flip charts, gum/ tape.
<i>Time</i>	1 hour.
<i>Process</i>	<p>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?</p> <p>Explain that all of us possess certain skills that allow us to live our lives. For example, the skill to write, work with others or make a decision.</p> <p>Pass out one flash card to each participant, and ask him/her to write the most important skill he/she possesses.</p> <p>Allow the participants 5 minutes to do this exercise.</p> <p>Invite the participants to display their cards on the floor. Ask them to group similar cards.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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”.</p> <p>After the participants finish writing and grouping the flash cards, ask them to arrange the flash cards in a horizontal line on the floor.</p> <p>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 on the floor.</p>

You should have 4 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 on a chart, and put it up on the wall.

Summarize 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 categorization of life skills is given at the start of the module. This categorization can be used for the summarization of the exercise and as a handout.



## Session 7.2

### What Use are Life Skills?

#### Expected Outcomes

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

#### Analyzing The Matrix

<i>Objective</i>	To learn about the importance of life skills in our lives.
<i>Materials</i>	The matrix from the previous exercise (session 7.1), flip charts, markers.
<i>Time</i>	45 minutes.
<i>Process</i>	<p>Ask the participants to take the matrix chart off the wall, and place it on the floor.</p> <p>Invite the participants to divide into three groups – communication/interpersonal skills group, decision-making/critical thinking skills group and coping/self-management skills group.</p> <p>Ask the three groups to look at the matrix and record the skills pertaining to their group.</p> <p>Explain the task to the groups as follows:  <i>Discuss and list the benefits of possessing the life skills that have been noted by each group.</i>  <i>Discuss and list the problems one would face if s/he did not have these life skills?</i></p> <p>Then, ask the three groups to sit in three different locations. Give them flip charts and markers.</p> <p>Allow 30 minutes to do this exercise.</p> <p>Invite the groups to display their work and make presentations.</p> <p>Encourage discussion and cross questioning in the groups.</p> <p>Summarize and close the exercise by emphasizing the importance of life skills.</p>

***Note for the facilitator***

This useful exercise emphasizes the utility and importance of life skills. You can use the information given in section 7.5 and 7.6 at the beginning of this module. Point out why life skills are important for young people. Make special mention of their importance in relation to protection against HIV/AIDS and STIs. You can present the list of the ten life skills necessary for protection against HIV/AIDS, STIs and drug use. These life skills include problem solving, critical thinking, communication skills, decision-making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self awareness building skills, empathy and coping with stress skills.

## Session 7.3

### Life Skills, STIs and HIV/AIDS

#### Expected Outcomes

Participants will be able to identify the life skills that are essential for protection against STIs and HIV/AIDS.

	<b>Skills I Need</b>
<i>Objective</i>	To learn about the essential skills required for protection against STIs and HIV/AIDS.
<i>Materials</i>	The matrix output from session 7.1, red marker pens.
<i>Time</i>	20 minutes.
<i>Process</i>	<p>Invite the participants to sit in a circle.</p> <p>Explain that, of the life skills previously discussed, some are critical for protection against STIs and HIV/AIDS.</p> <p>Ask the participants to take a look at the life skills displayed in the matrix output from session 7.1.</p> <p>Allow the group 10 minutes to discuss the life skills they consider most important for protection against STIs and HIV/AIDS.</p> <p>Invite a volunteer to take a red marker, and circle the life skills identified “most important” by the participants.</p> <p>Then, look at the matrix once again and see how many people possess each skill.</p> <p>Close the exercise with a summary of the outcomes, and point out that the participants will get an opportunity to learn and practice some of the life skills discussed in this module.</p>

#### **Note for the facilitator**

This exercise effectively focuses on the skills that young people need to possess in order to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS and STIs. Once again, emphasize the ten essential life skills listed as for protection against HIV/AIDS, STIs and drug use. These life skills have been listed in the facilitator’s note given at the bottom of the previous exercise.