

Life Skills Development

What are life skills?

World Vision follows UNICEF in defining life skills as an integrated set of critical thinking, personal, and interpersonal competencies that children and adolescents need to lead productive and fulfilling lives. They equip children from birth to 18 years of age to manage their thoughts, feelings and expressions in daily life and in difficult situations like poverty, crisis, conflict and marginalisation and to contribute to the well-being of their communities.

World Vision asserts that life skills are a core component of a child's or adolescent's development, and endorses the Dakar Goals in placing life skills among the minimal skills at the heart of a basic education and, therefore, the right of every child. While basic literacy and numeracy are equally critical to productivity and fulfillment, without the foundational, essential and applied life skills to complement them, the application of such knowledge for the well-being of both the child and their community will be hindered or misguided, at best.



World Vision India's Mehak girls group provides young women with the opportunity to learn about human rights, practise critical thinking and problem solving and develop their communication skills. They also take educational trips to gain a broader understanding of opportunities beyond the slums of North West Delhi, where they are from.

Life skills across the life cycle

Life skills develop best when they can build upon each other. Children who acquire these core competencies at age appropriate levels across each phase of their development thrive despite the difficulties of their local context.

Foundational life skills: Skills developed in early childhood (from ages 0 to 5) are perhaps the most critical, since skills learned at later stages depend on and build upon these initial competencies. Foundational skills must focus on early perception, initial motor skills, rhythm, sensory integration, and emerging confidence and oral expression. These become strong building blocks for initial literacy.

Essential life skills: Skills for children six to 11 years of age are developed next and deepen those the child has already acquired, focusing on memory, attention span, analytical skills, decision making and problem solving abilities, anger and fear management, self-esteem, personal responsibility, empathy, and cooperation, among others. At this stage, children can begin to strengthen these skills socially, making peer education relevant and necessary.

Applied life skills: Adolescents ages 12 to 18 learn to use their personal skills and abilities to improve the well-being of the communities around them. These skills focus on the application of the underlying essential skills to various arenas of everyday life: critical thinking for goal setting, making healthy lifestyle choices, stress management, resiliency in crisis, citizenship, leadership and entrepreneurial skills, creative expression, and attending to inner guidance and peace.

Together, the development of these skills will help ensure that children have:

- Increased resiliency to thrive and improved ability to benefit from schooling
- Better career opportunities and improved family habits as they become the next generation of parents
- Supportive, caring family and community environments which translates to improved community-based education, protection and economic success

Life Skills Action Learning



World Vision's approach to life skills programming

Life skills programming is guided by four basic principles:

1. Much of what children learn, they learn when they are very young
2. Children and adolescents need a safe environment as they learn
3. Children and adolescents need consistent, loving attention, acceptance and affection from at least one person
4. Children and adolescents learn by playing and trying things, and by observing and copying what others do

From birth, a child's development and learning is fostered through their interactions with caring human beings in secure, nurturing and stimulating environments. Therefore, World Vision's life skills programming employs a community-based approach that works with the child or adolescent, their family, peers and community partners. The approach includes home and community-based education – both formal and non-formal – that prioritises the development of skills and competencies of children and adolescents across the life cycle, building on incremental development gains at successive life stages.

Life skills development is not merely an education sector issue. World Vision has been developing life skills in children and adolescents for years through the programming of many other sectors. Because life skills are both formed and expressed through activities in any arena of daily life, an integrated sector approach is needed for the holistic development of the child. Health, child protection, participation, economic development, peacebuilding and spiritual nurture programming all provide opportunities for the acquisition of essential life skills as do cross-cutting themes like gender and disability.

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