



Healthy Life Skills

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Healthy life skills* refer to a broad range of skills that help prepare youth to lead healthful and productive lives. These may include skills that help prevent drug abuse and delinquent behavior, build self-esteem, and encourage educational attainment.¹ Life skills refer to abilities that help adolescents effectively respond to and cope with the demands of everyday life.² Healthy life skills training can include social and interpersonal skills (e.g., communication, empathy, assertiveness, negotiation), cognitive skills (e.g., decision-making, self-evaluation), and emotional coping skills (e.g., stress management, self-control).³

Development of healthy life skills can help adolescents learn how to negotiate within their relationships, encouraging them to learn to say no to sex or to engage in safer sexual behavior to reduce the risk of pregnancy.⁴ Healthy life skills training can help youth take greater responsibility for their own well-being and practice healthy behaviors in response to many risky situations, including those that can lead to drug use and abuse, dating violence, and adolescent pregnancy.⁵

WHAT WE KNOW

- School-based programs that focus on development of healthy life skills, especially those delivered during pre-adolescence (grades 1-6), can help lower the risk of adolescent pregnancy.⁶
- Healthy life skills are psychological, emotional, and cognitive. They do not include practical skills such as vocational training (e.g., carpentry, computer programming), financial training (e.g., creating a household budget, balancing a checkbook), or job training (e.g., how to interview). However, many of these skills are complementary and important for overall adolescent development.⁷
- Effective ways of teaching healthy life skills include modeling, providing opportunities to observe healthy life skills demonstrations, and social interactions (e.g., role play).⁸
- Interventions that focus on healthy life skills training often address risky behaviors (e.g., drug abuse, smoking). These interventions have positive effects on frequency of youth engagement in dangerous or delinquent behaviors.^{9, 10, 11}

* Throughout, we use the terms “life skills” and “healthy life skills” interchangeably to refer to the skills taught by healthy life skills curricula.

TIPS FOR INTEGRATING THE DEVELOPMENT OF HEALTHY LIFE SKILLS INTO YOUR PROGRAM

Provide Leadership Opportunities for Youth

- Train youth leaders who can help promote positive communication and strategies within their peer groups.
- Provide opportunities for peer leadership or participation in the community, which helps empower youth and contributes to overall stability.¹² Youth empowerment is connected to higher self-esteem and reduced participation in risky behavior.
- Offer adolescents the opportunity to serve on committees, attend summits, or develop and implement service projects to build and reinforce leadership skills.

Consider Partnering with Local Organizations That Provide Healthy Alternatives

- Incorporate concepts of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-determination with exercises that help to identify individual strengths, goals, and sources of community pride.
- Explore organizations in the community that provide opportunities for youth involvement and can be sustained beyond the life of the program. Sport-based or community service-based activities can help build many positive concepts (e.g., self-efficacy, self-esteem) and reinforce a healthy life skills training approach.^{13, 14}
- Consider partnering with organizations that provide these sport-based activities for youth (e.g., soccer clubs, running clubs). Sport-based activities, in addition to building self-esteem, help promote a healthy lifestyle that includes physical activity and wellness. Local parks and recreation departments, Girls on the Run chapters, YMCAs or YWCAs, religious organizations, and community centers may offer programs or connections to sport-based activities that can be incorporated into healthy life skills curricula.

Ensure Program Activities Are Hands-On and Interactive

- Provide opportunities to apply life skills to real-world scenarios through participatory learning activities, including role playing, skills rehearsal, group discussion, storytelling, and case study analysis. Youth retain healthy life skills best when the learning methods are interactive.¹⁵
- Ensure that facilitators are comfortable with and skilled in leading group participatory models.¹⁶
- Offer support and training related to specific challenges that youth face, including coping with peer pressure, which can occur in person or through social media.

SPECIFIC RESOURCES AND EXAMPLES

Evidence-based and Evidence-informed Interventions

Intervention	Description	More Information
Botvin LifeSkills Training (LST)	LST is a research-validated life skills training program that focuses on substance abuse prevention through development of healthy behavior. The program has elementary, middle, and high school modules.	https://www.lifeskillstraining.com/

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Evidence-based and Evidence-informed Interventions (continued)

Intervention	Description	More Information
Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) Health and Life Skills Programs	BGCA offers six programs for adolescents and young adults that help build self-esteem and decision-making. Programs start as young as age 8 and can span through age 18.	http://www.bgca.org/whatwedo/HealthLifeSkills/Pages/HealthLifeSkills.aspx
Casey Life Skills	Casey Life Skills is a free tool that assesses youth behaviors and competencies, including planning and goal-setting, designed for a collaborative conversation between youth and adults. It is appropriate for youth ages 14-21.	http://lifskills.casey.org/
Informed Parents and Children Together (ImPACT)	ImPACT is a culturally appropriate video with group discussion and role play for youth and parents to help increase decision-making, goal-setting, and communicating. The program focuses on African American youth ages 13-16 and low-income youth living in public housing developments.	http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/2115
The Fourth R	The Fourth R builds healthy school environments to help students develop healthy relationships and decision-making skills. The intervention is implemented by health and physical education teachers.	https://youthrelationships.org/fourth-r-programs

ONLINE RESOURCES

- **Child Trends' What Works/LINKS Database** offers providers a keyword-searchable repository of evidence-based and evidence-informed interventions. Providers can find interventions by target population, program characteristics, or outcome, with multiple sub-filters: <http://www.childtrends.org/what-works/>
- **Advocates for Youth** provides links to free and affordable life skills programs that professionals can use to supplement or add to their current adolescent pregnancy prevention curricula: <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/publications-a-z/536-life-skills-approaches-to-improving-youths-sexual-and-reproductive-health>
- **Act for Youth** offers providers links to free and low-cost life skills programming, communication toolkits, recommended readings, and resources for youth and adolescents: http://www.actforyouth.net/sexual_health/community/adulthood/life.cfm
- **World Health Organization Skills for Health** is a comprehensive report discussing the benefits of healthy life skills training on adolescent development: http://www.who.int/school_youth_health/media/en/sch_skills4health_03.pdf
- **Pan American Health Organization Life Skills Approach to Healthy Child and Adolescent Human Development** is a comprehensive report outlining what healthy life skills are and how to involve them in educational settings: http://hhd.edc.org/sites/hhd.org/files/paho_lifskills.pdf

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