
UNIT 10 LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION FOR ADOLESCENTS

Structure

- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Objectives
- 10.3 Understanding Life Skills and Life Skills Education
- 10.4 Importance of Life Skills Education for Adolescents
- 10.5 Core Life Skills
 - 10.5.1 Life Skills for Self-Understanding and Self- Management
 - 10.5.1.1 Self-esteem
 - 10.5.1.2 Self-awareness
 - 10.5.1.3 Assertiveness
 - 10.5.1.4 Coping with stress
 - 10.5.1.5 Coping with emotions
 - 10.5.2 Life Skills for Knowing and Living with Others
 - 10.5.2.1 Effective Communication
 - 10.5.2.2 Interpersonal relationships
 - 10.5.2.3 Empathy
 - 10.5.2.4 Conflict resolution
 - 10.5.3 Life Skills for Dealing with Issues and Problems
 - 10.5.3.1 Critical thinking
 - 10.5.3.2 Creative thinking
 - 10.5.3.3 Decision-making
 - 10.5.3.4 Problem-solving
- 10.6 Life Skills Education Programme in Schools
- 10.7 Let us Sum Up
- 10.8 Unit- End Exercises
- 10.9 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 10.10 References and Suggested Readings

10.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 9 of this block, you have gone through some of the contemporary issues that affect adolescents in general. Adolescence is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. It is an important stage in one's growth and development. Adolescents experience a spurt in their growth. The sudden functioning of sexual glands and increase in physical energy make them restless. Their emotions are not consistent but fluctuating. This makes them moody. Sadness and happiness alternates frequently. As a result, their emotional balancing is often disturbed. They may remain tense and anxious most of the time. They are likely to be haunted by a sense of fear, anxiety and depression. Despite all these, adolescence is a period in which important decisions are made. It is the time to know who you are and what you want to be in life. It is a period when you decide which stream and what course of study you should pursue. It is you, not your parents, who should make decisions related to your future. Therefore, you are likely to face several issues and problems during this stage. If

you develop a few life skills, they can help you in a big way, not only to know and manage yourself, but also to handle well the issues and problems you confront now and hereafter in your life.

Life skills are skills, strengths and capabilities that help you to face problems of everyday life with a positive attitude and handle issues effectively. Life skills strengthen your capabilities and help you face life problems with ease and confidence. This Unit attempts to provide you with details about some of the most fundamental life skills and how they can be used for all round growth and development.

10.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you should be able to:

- define what life skills education are;
- spell out innumerable benefits that can be drawn out of life skills education;
- explain the importance of developing life skills;
- name the various core life skills;
- expound life skills that can lead to self-understanding and self-management;
- apply skills for building up self-awareness and self-management;
- define various skills that can help you learn to live together;
- build up abilities for getting along with others amicably;
- name the life skills that can help you handle issues and problems;
- make optimum use of these skills to handle issues and problems you face in your day-to-day life; and
- explain the steps schools take to teach life skills to students.

10.3 UNDERSTANDING LIFE SKILLS AND LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION

Life skills are abilities that help you face life problems with ease and confidence. They refer to a multiplicity of psycho-social and interpersonal competencies that consist of bundles of habits. Life skills help adolescents make informed decisions, communicate effectively, develop coping and management skills to lead a healthy and productive life. Life skills such as self-esteem, self-awareness, assertiveness, coping with stress, coping with emotions, etc. can enable you to understand yourself, your strengths and weaknesses, your character and personality, and your values and principles. Your awareness about your positive points can enable you to make the most of your strengths and eliminate your weaknesses. As a result, in course time, you will be able to learn better and gradually move towards excellence. Similarly, life skills like effective communication, interpersonal relationships, empathy and conflict resolution help you understand others and get along with them amicably. Some other life skills such as critical thinking, creative thinking, decision making and problem solving help you deal with issues and problems that you face in your life.

Life skills, therefore, are very important for an individual. In spite of this, so far no serious efforts are being made to teach these skills to students. Even though we teach them a number of cognitive skills, life skills are yet to find their way into our class-room teaching. The World Health Organization has recognized its importance

and efforts and is already afoot to teach these skills to the adolescents in schools. It has helped some state governments and a number of teachers have been trained to infuse these skills with the curriculum that already exists. In course of time, it is hoped that our students will be equipped with these skills. Once students develop these skills, they will not only know themselves and get along amicably with others, but also handle the problems and issues they face in their day-to-day life.

10.4 IMPORTANCE OF LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION FOR ADOLESCENTS

Life skills, as we have already noted, are abilities that enable adolescents to deal effectively with demands and challenges of everyday life. Adolescence is a time wherein teenagers go through a lot of physical and emotional changes. Their body begins to grow rapidly in shape and size. They also experience hormone change and sexual maturation. Girls experience menarche and boys, spermatarche. All these changes make them uncomfortable. They leave them confused and vulnerable. These pubertal changes affect their self-esteem and they develop poor body image. They become more concerned about how they look rather than what they want to accomplish in their life. If adolescents are equipped with life skills, they will be able to cope with all such situations successfully.

You have studied in Unit 9 how adolescents become prone to risky behaviours. Adolescence is a period of excitement, experimentation, and change. Adolescents are curious and want to experiment several things. They may easily divert their attention into activities such as smoking, using drugs, fighting, and taking laws into their hands. They are also prone to sexual relationships owing either to coercion or peer pressure. Many are pushed into action without giving any thought to consequences. Such individuals can possibly become subject to sexually transmitted infections. They need to learn the importance of saying “no” especially at times to negative peer pressure. They need to learn to take control of their emotions and make informed decisions. In all such situations, life skills surely guide them and place them on the high way to development.

Thus, life skills supply adolescents with capacity to deal with effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Life skills like critical thinking, creative thinking, etc. are higher order skills. If the students manage to equip themselves with these skills, they will be able to make predictions, make inferences, formulate hypotheses, draw conclusions, make decisions, solve problems, identify assumptions, recognize logical inconsistencies, etc. Self-awareness, for example, is a life skill that can throw ample light on oneself. It can shed light on our emotions, our behaviours, our social competence, our preferences, our goals, etc. Developing interpersonal relations is yet another important life skill. It is a competence that helps us relate to others effectively. In this way each life skill has much to contribute towards making us more effective and efficient. Life skill education, therefore, is something that is unavoidable as far as adolescents are concerned. It will unquestionably place them on the highway to growth and development.

10.5 CORE LIFE SKILLS

The term “core” refers to something fundamental or very important. Life skills are several in numbers. It is not necessary for students to learn all of them. However, the benefits that they yield are so inestimable that it is totally unjust to deprive them of developing at least a few of the most important ones. The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified a few life skills as basic. They are self-esteem, self-awareness,

assertiveness, coping with stress, coping with emotions, effective communication, interpersonal relationships (managing peer relationships), empathy, conflict management, critical thinking, creative thinking, decision-making and problem solving. These core life skills are categorized under three heads, namely, (i) life skills for self-understanding and self management, (ii) life skills that help to live with others, and (iii) life skills that help you handle various issues and problems that you face in your day-to-day life. As these life skills are crucial to students, we discuss each of them briefly.

10.5.1 LIFE SKILLS FOR SELF-UNDERSTANDING AND SELF-MANAGEMENT

Self-knowledge is basic to growth and development. In case, you know very little about yourself, your chances for development are meager. It is awareness about your positive and negative aspects that motivate you to make the most of your positive qualities and eliminate your weaknesses. It is awareness and intense motivation that enable you to spend your time and energy to accomplish tasks. If you develop life skills such as self-esteem, self-awareness, assertiveness, coping with stress and coping with emotions, they will provide you with the required insight into all aspects of your life that will help you manage yourself well. Hence these life skills should be dealt with at some length.

10.5.1.1 Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to the state of mind of an individual arrived at as a result of accurate and objective assessment of his or her abilities, affiliations, and influences. The way we think, feel and act depends largely on our self-esteem. It is such a state of mind that hardly leaves any sphere of your life untouched. Whether or not you are confident, assertive, willing to take risks, responsible, optimistic, internally-driven and proactive depends to a great extent on your self-esteem. When your self-esteem takes a downward trend, you begin to show up the tendency to run away from responsibilities, turn out to be fatalistic, reactive and wait for things to happen rather than take the initiative needed to make them happen. You become lonely and moody, and get hurt easily, exhibit lack of confidence and wait for approval from others. As you lack vision, you fail to set moderately challenging goals and carry them through to success. You will then hardly get opportunity for experiencing success and the happiness that accompanies it.

Enhancing your self-esteem is important, if you wish to develop a wholesome personality, increase your capacity to learn, and not to fall a victim to depression and other psychological disturbances. The causes of low self-esteem are many. Lack of clear-cut and meaningful goals and objectives, self-indulgence, procrastination, lack of self-discipline, harbouring shame, guilt, remorse, self-pity, comparing yourself and your accomplishments with those of others, depending on others for doing things, judging yourself for every frailty, shortcoming or mistake are some of the major reasons that prevent you from cultivating a high level of self-esteem. In case, you wish to nurture a high level of self-esteem, you have to set realistic goals, develop assertiveness skills, take up responsibility for your own growth and development, monitor your own emotions and impulses and lead a life of values and principles.

10.5.1.2 Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is knowledge about yourself. It has to do with paying ongoing attention to your internal state such as your moods and feelings, your beliefs and values, your behaviour and attitudes, etc. and having an impartial assessment of them. It is a

neutral awareness of what is happening in you. It involves awareness about your own emotions, your behaviour, your locus of control, and your strengths and weaknesses. Individuals with a strong sense of self-awareness can know where they are strong and where they are weak. As we develop awareness about our self-worth, we become more self-confident. As a result, with the passage of time, we will be more decisive, make sound judgements using the emotional and cognitive information available within us.

In case we lack self-awareness, there are quite a number of ways to build it up. Introspection and feedback from others are just two of these ways. You may begin your introspection with a single thought related to some period in the past. Then you allow your mind to gradually work backward recalling specific incidents, people, places and events associated with that particular period. This type of reflection about the past, your role in various occasions will give you the required insight about yourself. In spite of introspection, you may not get to know all what you need about yourself. In that case, asking one of your close relatives or friends for feedback would be a fine way of knowing more. This will enable you to have another's opinion about your strengths and weaknesses, to get assurance whether or not what you are doing is right, to verify whether you see yourself the same way as others see you. Feedback, be it positive or negative, is important. It gives another's opinion on how you behave. It is a way of learning more about yourself and the effects of your behaviour has on others. Unless you seek feedback, you may never come to know about those aspects. In the absence of feedback, no change can be worked out. You stand to lose the opportunity to learn and develop.

10.5.1.3 Assertiveness

Assertiveness is not aggression as many take it for. It means knowing our rights well and standing up for them while remaining conscious about the rights of others. Assertive people are neither aggressive nor abusive. They are neither garrulous nor over controlled. They have the ability to communicate clearly and unambiguously while remaining conscious about the needs, wishes and rights of others in any social encounter. They have the capacity to express their rights with the needed intensity in ways that are appropriate. For example, someone in your class asks you to show the assignment to copy, but you don't oblige as the assignment should be done without any help. Individuals who are assertive do not resort to sabotage even when they have to disagree with others. In short, what assertiveness envisages is not something of confrontation but a win-win situation or a constructive compromise.

As we have already noted, assertiveness involves knowing our rights and standing up for them. We have the right to express our feelings, opinions and beliefs, to say "yes" or "no", to change our mind, to make reasonable request to others, etc. Merely knowing what our rights are is not enough. We should also know how to put them across to others in ways that are polite and unambiguous. Only when we are in a position to convey to others what we want in crystal clear terms will our chances of getting it improve. Absence of assertiveness can literally ruin your personal growth and force you to lead your life as per the whims and fancies of others. In fact, if you are not assertive, people might use you like doormats.

Assertiveness is something that is learned. It can be built up if you can spare sufficient time and energy. Developing it has several advantages. It is something that is liberating. It would open up several possibilities for growth and development. In case you lack assertiveness, you may look around for any of your friends who are assertive. Begin to observe him or her and closely study his/her ways of interaction. This will give you opportunity to identify what you miss out. In course of time, with sustained

practice, you will turn out to be as assertive as the person whom you have made as model for imitation and practice.

10.5.1.4 Coping with Stress

Coping with stress is just another life skill that you need to know. Stress generally refers to the reaction that people show when they encounter excessive pressure. Depending upon our attitude and our level of tolerance, the pressure we experience may keep varying. Stress lays much more of a demand on the person's ability than it can meet. This tension which is beyond one's capacity to cope with lead to stress. People tend to experience stress when the pressure becomes excessive.

Causes of stress are many. Every day we are confronted with several situations that produce stress. As a student, you may feel stressful if you have the habit of postponing your task of learning. What you are supposed to learn today, you put off for tomorrow. This postponement goes on and on till the exam date approaches. Then you have a lot of things to study in a little time. It is quite natural to feel tense. Apart from this, your ways of thinking, feeling and acting, can lead to stress. Similarly, when you are involved in dull and uninteresting tasks, conflict with peers whom you love, physical ailment, threat to your security, personal loss through death, etc. stress can occur.

Even though stress when it is excessive is harmful, a slight amount of stress is a great source of assistance. It is essential for spurring motivation providing the stimulation for taking up challenging tasks. To get the most out of life, we require a certain amount of stress. It would act as an impetus to complete tasks that are important. Thus a mild stress can be a useful source for creative energy. However, if it is severe, it can turn out to not only damaging but also fatal. Stress is the root cause of many illnesses. If stress responses are not managed in time, they can lead to fatal consequences such as hypertension, ulcers, diabetes, muscular dystrophy, etc. If we do not learn to cope with stress, our immune system would decline and signs of hypertension, neurosis, apathy, and depression, etc. would begin to show up rather early in life.

There are several ways to cope with stress. One of them is to challenge our way of thinking. We need to avoid preoccupation with debilitating negative thoughts and focus only on our strengths and victories. Similarly we have to avoid the habit of worrying and projecting the worst that can happen. We also need to assess whether or not worry is worth the price we pay. Similarly, by getting organized, avoiding procrastination, developing a good sense of humour, striking a balance between study and leisure, we can keep stress at bay to a great extent.

10.5.1.5 Coping with Emotions

Emotions are powerful feelings that are directed at something or someone. Emotions and impulses propel people to action. Emotions can be positive or negative. Anger, fear, anxiety, worry etc. are examples of negative emotions while hope, optimism, love, etc. are examples of positive ones. Emotions, be they positive or negative, would keep on crossing the mind. We cannot stop them. But whether we entertain them is something that is within our power. In case we entertain them they can run riot and land us in trouble. We have to intervene in time and put a check on them before they assume the shape of a monster. Emotional management, however, doesn't mean total suppression. In fact, emotions are an important element in our lives. What is required is emotional restraint, some sort of tempered balance and wisdom. Total absence of emotions can make our life dull and isolate us from the richness of life. So when emotions are muted, it can create dullness and distance. When left

unchecked, they become pathological and lead us to depression, over whelming anxiety and raging anger. Unless we keep distressed emotions under check, we will not experience emotional well- being.

Hence, we have to find ways to cope with our emotions. Controlling emotions is easier said than done. This doesn't mean that we should allow our emotions to go on unchecked. So when we are under the grip of strong feelings, we should strive to know precisely what feelings we are presently expressing, name those feelings and trace the sources from which they spring up. Once we are able to identify our inner feelings and sources from which they arise, we are in a better position to bring our discretion and rationalization to bear upon them. In the process, we will be able to assess the pros and cons if we allow our feelings to go unchecked. This will give us a fair idea as to whether or not to continue with the expression of our feelings or to bring some sort of constraint on them so that they are expressed appropriately and effectively. Symptoms of deficiency in emotional management manifest themselves in incidents of violence, juvenile arrest rate for violent crimes, suicide rate of teenagers, rapes and mental illnesses.

Life skills, such as self-esteem, self-awareness, assertiveness, coping with stress, and coping with emotions can provide you with the much needed understanding about yourself and ability to manage yourself so that you can go steadily along the path of growth and development without any sort of disturbances. So these skills are inevitable for you. The understanding and insight you gained from picking up these skills will enable you to focus on your studies and come out with glory.

Check Your Progress 1

Notes: (a) Write your answers in the space given below.

(b) Compare your answers with the one given at the end of the unit.

i) What does self-awareness mean?

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ii) What do you think are the main causes of stress?

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iii) Explain any of the ways for coping with stress.

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iv) What do you think are the consequences of not being assertive?

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10.5.2 LIFE-SKILLS FOR KNOWING AND LIVING WITH OTHERS

Contemporary world, the world in which we live, is a world of violence where what is focused is diversity and not unity. There is constant strife in societies of the world in the name of religion, caste, ideals, etc. Individuals and groups are found involved in perpetual battle against one another for power, wealth and status. With better means of communication and transportation, mobility of people from one part of the world to other parts has become a trend. As a result, the world is fast becoming a melting pot of races, cultures, religions and ideas. It may so happen that the family that lives next to you may be a Punjabi, Bengalee or a Tamilian. We cannot build walls between us and our neighbors and live a secluded life. In case we keep on developing biases and prejudices, and keep on waging private battles, against one another, there is little scope for growth and progress. In a pluralist country like India which is a socialist democratic republic involved in building up an egalitarian society, where peace and serenity prevail we have to give up sectarian tendencies and learn to live together. Learning to live together is the foundation stone of democratic living.

Some of the life skills that can help us learn to live together are effective communication, interpersonal relationships (managing peer relationships), empathy negotiation, and conflict resolution. Mastering these skills is important as they will help you in a big way in managing peer relationships. Attaining proficiency in these skills is also important for your future life. They will help you, as an adult to get along with others amicably and live a life of collaboration and synergy.

10.5.2.1 Effective Communication

Nothing can make as much of a dramatic effect on our personal and school life as speaking well. The impression you make on others mostly depends on the way you speak-the pitch, expressiveness and clarity of your voice. From the tone of your voice and your manner of saying things, your listeners can deduce a lot about your feelings and personality. They will be able to tell you whether you are confident or frightened, excited or depressed, and friendly or aggressive. Depending on whether you articulate in a clear and confident way or stumbling and hesitant manner, they will be able to tell you the extent of your intelligence and expertise.

Any message that involves the face-to-face mode such as conversation consists of a number of components such as tone, words and body language. Only when all the components are appropriately integrated, effective communication is possible. You should make your tone message in accordance with the situation in question. When you are angry, for example, you have to make your tone of voice harsh, volume loud, eye-contact direct, and posture rigid. Conversely, when you speak to your friends, your tone of voice should be warm, volume easy on the ears, eye contact direct yet unobtrusive, facial expression smiling and posture relaxed. When you encounter a situation that demands sadness, your tone of voice is soft, facial expression tearful, the corners of your mouth curved downwards and posture slouched. In this

way, only when you integrate all the components of communication to suit the occasion in question, your communication becomes effective. So you need to understand each situation and use the right modality that suits it.

Above and over all these, if you can learn and practice a few habits, you will be able to make your communication much better. If you are able to cultivate the habit of thinking before you speak, believe the message you convey, keep your talk at the audience perception level, avoid annoying mannerisms and gestures, repeat major points, and use generalizations sparingly, and avoid expressions that hurt, your communication would rise above the mediocre. If you are willing to spend a bit of your energy and time on a regular basis to practice these, you will not only boost your confidence but also deepen the impression you make upon others. You can then easily persuade and convince your listeners and get along with them smoothly. You will have a lot of peers as your friends and collaborate with them in building better knowledge and skills.

10.5.2.2 Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal relationship is yet another life-skill that helps us get along smoothly with our peers. These skills are techniques that help us relate to others. They tell you what you should and what you should not do in your dealing with your friends. In short, they highlight the mutual give and take in any relationships. The mutual give and take is an important feature of successful interpersonal interaction. These skills are learned. Family, school, neighbourhood are the main places that give scope for learning these skills. You learned most of them through observation and some from consequences.

Understanding human nature is one of the first steps in developing good relationships. For this, you need to concentrate on others, pay close attention to them, listen to them properly, and look for clues in their body language. Body language is a language of signals. When we interact with others, we generally express our feelings through our gestures, facial expressions, and body postures. The body continues to transmit signals unconsciously throughout any interaction. These signals will give us clues to their state of mind. They will tell us whether they are listening to us as we talk and whether they are interested in what we talk. Most people fail to give attention to such social signals. If you are alert, social signals are not difficult to catch. If you find the listener fidgeting, distracted, unfocused, glancing at the watch or looking towards the door, casting eyes upwards and appearing angry, these are indications that your listener is bored. Your success in life depends, to a great extent, on your ability to understand your friends and act wisely. Your peers crave for appreciation, affiliation, and importance. If you remember their names, praise and encourage them, offer them constructive criticism, handle disagreements with tact, make them feel important, read their body language and interpret their voice messages with care, you will be favorably poised for harmony and understanding. Those who are poor at these are prone to problems in their relationships with others, feeling uncomfortable in their company. So to be successful in life, you ought to pick up interpersonal skills.

10.5.2.3 Empathy

Empathy is another life skill that helps us understand others. It refers to the feeling of emotional understanding and unity with another, such that an emotion felt by one person is experienced to some degree by another who is empathic to them. In other words, empathy involves the ability to mimic externally the feelings of another person. The essence of empathy is being able to see reality from the other person's perspective. As others talk to us, they reveal their feeling through their tone of voice, facial

expressions or other non-verbal ways. A successful human relationship involves understanding others and their nature. Through empathic listening we will be able to find what the other person is, and not what we think he or she is. This understanding will help you respond appropriately to their moods, temperaments, motivations and desires and act wisely in your interactions and dealings. As you continue to capture the feelings and act wisely, they feel that they are important. They begin to feel inclined towards you. In this state of mind, they and you feel comfortable to be in each other's company. This state of the mind is called rapport.

When you attain proficiency in empathic listening, you stand to benefit in several ways. Through it, you can build good study relationships. As there is good understanding between you and the other persons, you can engage in collaborative learning and cooperative management of study tasks. You can build trust and closeness to your peers easily. You can improve your study habits, bring about better learning performance, and make your learning more pleasurable. In short, your ability to empathize will lead you to a stage wherein harmony, collaboration and synergy are possible. You will also be able to help your friends when they are in the grip of stress and strain.

10.5.2.4 Conflict Resolution

When two or more people come together, work together, and live together, conflicts are bound to occur. It may arise between teacher and principal, student and teacher, husband and wife, and boss and subordinates. Conflict means sharp disagreement, antagonism, struggle or fight. Conflicts are nothing but overt struggle between individuals or groups for the same goals. Sources of conflicts can be many. They may spring up as a result of value differences, misperceptions, questions of control over resources, competition for positions and opportunities, and deficient and unscientific ways of thinking. Whatever be the causes of conflicts, they can produce immense pain, stress and unhappiness. They can lower output, and even lead to strikes and untold miseries, unless taken up and resolved in time. As conflicts are inevitable in human relationships, we need to prevent as well as manage conflicts.

There are several ways for resolving conflicts. Out of them, the collaborative style of solving conflicts seems to be the best. This style of conflict management involves the coming together of the conflicting parties as teams in working together on their differences. The collaborative style of resolving conflict is a process and as such it involves a series of stages or steps. As these steps are important, they need to be explained briefly.

The **first step** is to confront the conflict. This is possible only when both the parties involved in the conflict have the desire to resolve the problem. They should select a responsible person acceptable to both the parties involved and discuss the matter under his leadership.

The **second step** is to understand each others position. At this stage, each party takes turns and presents its points focusing on real issues involving the conflict and strives to understand each other's viewpoints as accurately as possible.

The **next step** is to define the problem. They arrive at a mutually acceptable definition of the problem. They need to identify the causes of the problem and find out areas of common ground to arrive at a mutually acceptable definition of the problem.

The **fourth step** involves generation of all the alternatives that can be used for solving the problem and selection of the best alternative that is acceptable to both the groups concerned. State the agreements clearly and put it into writing to serve as a record for reference.

The **fifth step** is to take action and evaluate its functioning. Once the action is taken, we have to see whether or not it produces the intended results. In case, it does not yield the expected result, we need to make adjustments where necessary. Effective resolution of conflict is important to eliminate discord and bring in harmony and effective functioning.

Check Your Progress 2

Notes: (a) Write your answers in the space given below.

(b) Compare your answers with the one given at the end of the unit.

i) What habits will you develop to make your communication more effective?

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ii) What role does empathy play in interpersonal relations?

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iii) Give some of the reasons that can lead to conflicts.

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iv) Explain some of the ways through which interpersonal relations can be enhanced.

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v) What steps do conflict resolution generally involve?

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10.5.3 LIFE SKILLS FOR DEALING WITH ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

Critical thinking, creative thinking, decision making and problem solving are life skills that help us handle issues and problems that we confront in our day-to-day life. You cannot live an effective and efficient life just by attaining proficiency in life skills that lead to self-understanding and self-management and skills that help you learn to live together. To develop a personality that is sound and wholesome, these skills alone are not sufficient. In addition, we need skills that enable us deal with issues and problems.

10.5.3.1 Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is a skill that helps us look analytically at events, people, objects, actions and even literary works with a view to gathering information that is relevant and objective with the help of which we can assess and evaluate them. In our day-to-day life, we have to think critically before we speak or do anything. If we spurt out something or do something without thinking, it would often land us in trouble. In case you speak sarcastically and hurt the feelings of your friends, you are likely to lose them as friends. If you join a course of study without thinking about its utility, scope, and nature, you may have to drop out of it in a short while. As a result, you will lose not only a lot of money, but also your precious time and energy. Hence critical thinking is important and we need to learn it. We need to know what it is and practice a lot to be proficient in it.

Critical thinking being so important, you need to do all what you can to develop it. There are several ways for developing it. One of them is to focus on “how?” and “why” in addition to what happened when you read reports on events and incidents. Another way to develop it is to search for evidence before you accept anything as you read or listen to others. The habit of comparing various answers to a question and finding the best one is yet another way to develop critical thinking. You can also develop critical thinking through asking questions to yourself and speculating beyond what you already know to create new ideas. Evaluating and possibly questioning what others say rather than immediately accepting it as truth is yet another way to develop it.

In short, critical thinking will help you in your studies, in making decisions, solving problems, passing judgments, and ensuring maximum utilization of resources. It will also help you to be more inquisitive, insightful, and humane.

10.5.3.2 Creative Thinking

Creative thinking refers to the ability to produce something novel, useful, and unique. It involves the ability to think about something in novel and unusual ways and come up with unique solutions to problems. Fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration are the main characteristics of creativity. The characteristic of fluency involves generation of many ideas. Flexibility involves the ability to shift perspectives easily. While the characteristic of originality stands for conceiving something new, elaboration refers to building of many ideas. Creativity also refers to challenge accepted ideas and ways of doing things in order to find new solutions or concepts. Similarly, using an equipment originally meant for something, if used for another purpose, it is creativity. In the same way, putting previously unconnected ideas together to come out with something entirely new is also a creative act.

Creativity is not something that comes unsolicited. As a teacher or prospective teacher, you could strive to build up expertise, creative thinking skills and intrinsic task

motivation among your students. Expertise refers to deep knowledge in the area of your specialization. Creative thinking skills refer to such skills as brainstorming, lateral thinking, divergent thinking, etc. Intrinsic task motivation refers to a burning desire to accomplish certain tasks. Only when you succeed in acquiring these components of creativity at appropriate level, you can be creative in the literal sense.

There are several ways in which creativity can be developed. Brainstorming is one of them. You can do this either alone or in groups. It is a technique for generating ideas without stopping to evaluate them. You can come up with creative ideas, play off each other's ideas and say practically whatever comes to mind that seems relevant to a particular issue. At the end when no more ideas coming up, you can examine the ideas jotted down, select the ones relevant and reject those irrelevant.

Divergent thinking is another technique that can be used for creating new ideas. Unlike convergent thinking which produces one correct answer, divergent thinking can produce many answers to the same question. Lateral thinking is yet another technique for producing new ideas. In this technique, the problem is reformulated or viewed from a fresh angle. This method is contrasted with vertical thinking which involves finding methods for overcoming obstacles in the chosen line of approach. Identifying creative people and finding out what helped them to be creative, fostering flexible and playful thinking and getting internally motivated are some other techniques for fostering creativity.

10.5.3.3 Decision-Making

Decision-making is one of the life skills that we have to utilize before solving problems and handling issues. Students have to take decisions on many occasions. At some time or other, they have to decide the school or institution they have to enroll or the course of studies they have to pursue. Similarly, they have to decide whether to stay at home or in the hostel during their period of study. In case they are clear about how decisions are generally made, it would make the task easier. They have to study each situation carefully before decision is being made. Hence, it would be nice to know what decision making refers to and how it is generally made.

The model of decision-making that is generally used in the technical area has four steps. These steps are as follows:

- (i) *Problem finding*: This step involves locating the problem and analytically studying in detail.
- (ii) *Problem stating*: This step looks into all the dimensions of the problem and coming out with its definition.
- (iii) *Option finding*: At this stage, the decision maker has to generate as many alternatives as possible through which the problem in question could be solved.
- (iv) *Decision-Making*: It is at this stage, the decision maker critically studies each option and arrives on the most appropriate option.

For example, most of the adolescents after completion of secondary education will face difficulty in taking decisions on opting further stream of courses. In that case, as teachers, you could help them find their area of interest and give various career options. Decision-making, as the above steps reveal, involves choosing a course of action from among the several well defined and frequently competing alternatives after due deliberations. Before arriving at the proper option you have to weigh the cost and benefits of various outcomes.

10.5.3.4 Problem-Solving

Problem-solving, like decision-making, is a life skill that is as important as and perhaps more important than decision making. Problems are situations that are not easy to surmount. Problems, be they big or small, have to be faced and overcome. In case we fail, life would come to a standstill, goals would remain unaccomplished, and the person concerned will be filled with anxiety and worry. Problems can immobilize and render us helpless. Unless we tackle them at the proper time, they will render us handicapped. If we allow problems to get the better of us, they will slow down our overall growth and development. Our happiness and prosperity would show up a downward trend ultimately resulting in a degrading downfall. Hence we are left with no choice but tackle them in time as they arise.

Problem-solving is a process and so it involves a number of steps:

Step 1: Find and Frame the problem: The first step in problem solving is to find and frame the problem. The problem you select should be neither too broad nor too narrow. If it is too broad, you will not be able to complete it within the stipulated time. If it is too narrow, you will not be able to gather enough stuff to support your point of view. Once you have identified the topic, you have to look at it from all perspectives and define it in crystal clear terms.

Step 2: Develop a good problem solving strategy: Once you have identified and defined the problem, the next step is to select a suitable strategy for solving it. The common strategies that are used for solving problems are: (i) setting sub goals, (ii) using algorithms, and (iii) relying on heuristics.

- (i) Setting sub goals refers to breaking the overall goal into a number of sub goals such as locating resources, gathering information, organizing information, preparing the first draft, etc. In other words, it is concerned with setting the time schedule notifying the time period allowed to each stage.
- (ii) Using algorithms is yet another strategy that can be used for solving problems. Algorithms are strategies that guarantee a solution to a problem. They come in different forms such as formulas, instructions, tests, etc.
- (iii) Heuristics refers to a rough and ready procedure for solving problems without the application of an algorithm. Heuristics help us narrow down the possibilities to find one that works.

The investigator who is trying to solve the problem can select the most appropriate of these strategies for solving the problem.

Step 3: Evaluate the solution:

Taking action in itself is not enough. We have to see whether or not the results of the action stand in relation to the expected outcome. We have to evaluate and find out the extent to which the plan is working in practice.

Step 4: Rethink and Redefine problems and solutions over time. In case, the action does not yield the expected result we have to bring about the needed changes in the process.

For example, you might have come across with children who feel stressed often. In this situation, you could help them find out the source of stress whether it is generating from academic work or home problems. Spend time with such children to express their pent-up feelings and suggest various strategies to handle such situations. An individual who is trying to solve a problem can select the most appropriate strategy for solving her/his problem.

10.6 LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN SCHOOL

Life-skills education programme has now become an integral part of education system all over the world. However, in Indian schools, although some attempts have been made, it has not yet got the attention it deserves. In most schools, value education is introduced as it is one of the requirements of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005).

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) introduced life skills education in class 6th in 2003-04, in class 7th in 2004-05, and subsequently in classes 8th, 9th, and 10th. The CBSE, after eight years of research, during 2010 introduced Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation in IX and X class along with grading system. Similarly, the CCE employed in schools that covers all aspects of students' development, has included life skills under the captions: thinking skills, social skills and emotional skills.

The CBSE introduced in 2012 a life skills training programme as part of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation targeting students between 10-18 years of age. Similarly, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA) under its agenda for quality elementary education of upper primary girls gives them life skills training.

Our schools generally give importance to teaching of knowledge. Skills, especially, life skills have not so far given the importance they deserve. As we know, knowledge keeps changing in the light of more explorations and research. Moreover, knowledge in itself has not much use unless it is put to use. What our youngsters need today is education of life skills. The UNESCO has recommended that the education of the life skills is of paramount importance to our youngsters. Life skills, unlike knowledge, like good friends gives them company throughout their life and help them not only know themselves but also help them learn to live with other and solve various issues and problems they confront in their day-to-day life. Schools are now identified as the agencies that can teach life skills to students.

The UNESCO has now joined hands with various state government education departments and is trying to equip adolescents with life skills. They mainly use two strategies for this purpose, namely, (i) infusion approach, (ii) direct approach. The infusion approach tries to identify suitable situations within the established subject areas and extend the matter in such a way as to facilitate the teaching of various life skills. A teacher of Social Science who teaches the topic of colonization, for example, after teaching the meaning of the concept and process it involved, can extend the matter by including the cons and pros of the issue involved. In the process, s/he can help students come out with advantages and disadvantages of colonization. Then s/he can ask them to weigh both the advantages and disadvantages of colonization and state whether colonization was a curse or a blessing. In the process s/he has helped students practice critical thinking, creative thinking and decision making.

Apart from the infused thinking instruction which we have discussed above, another method that can be used for fostering life skills is the direct approach. In this way of teaching, life skills become part and parcel of the curriculum. As in the case of other topics, life skills are taught by the teacher through discussion, demonstration and practice. Whatever may be the methods adopted, life skills education is very important for adolescents.

Though some stray attempts have been made here and there to introduce life skills, it is yet to become part and parcel of the curriculum in most of the schools in major parts of India.

10.7 LET US SUM UP

Life skills are skills, strengths, and capabilities that can help adolescents face life problems with a positive attitude and carry out various tasks with effectiveness and efficiency. Life skills are so many that we cannot learn all of them. We need to learn only a few that are considered to be core life skills. Some of these core skills like self-esteem, self-awareness, assertiveness, coping with stress and coping with emotions help us understand and manage ourselves. Similarly, life skills like effective communication, interpersonal relationships, empathy and conflict resolution help us get along peacefully and amicably with others. Another set of life skills like critical thinking, creative thinking, decision making and problem-solving help us to handle issues and problems that we confront in our day-to-day life. The importance of learning life-skills is being widely understood today and efforts are already on in equipping adolescents with life skills.

10.8 UNIT-END EXERCISES

1. What does life-skills education mean?
2. Why is life-skills education important?
3. Give any three examples of core life skills that can lead to self-understanding and self management of adolescents?
4. Explain the meaning of “learning to live together”.
5. Name three core life skills that help you deal with issues and problems.
6. Name the various steps involved in decision making (technical area) and explain them briefly.

10.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1.
 - i) Self-awareness generally refers to knowledge about our own character and personality, strengths and weaknesses, and likes and dislikes.
 - ii) The main reasons that lead to stress are the habit of procrastination of tasks, ways of thinking, feeling and acting, physical ailments, threat to security, personal loss through death or divorce, conflict with peers, etc.
 - iii) We should not entertain negative emotions. If we do so, they may go out of our control. So before it is too late, we need to introspect, identify the emotions that pass through our mind, name those feelings, trace the sources from which they arise, apply our discretion on them and assess the pros and cons if we allow our emotions go unchecked. In case the disadvantages outweigh the advantages, we should exercise restraint on our emotions.
 - iv) Absence of assertiveness can literally ruin our personal and scholastic life. In its absence, we will be forced to lead our life as per the whims and fancies of others. In short, if we are not assertive, others might use us like a dormat.
2.
 - i) If I learn and practice a few habits, I can make my communication effective. Thinking before I speak, keeping my talk at the audience perception level, avoiding annoying mannerisms and gestures, eliminating expressions that hurt, and using generalizations sparingly are some of the habits that can make my communication more effective.

- ii) Empathy can help you understand your peers, motivate them and learn cooperatively with them. It will also help you respond appropriately to their moods, temperaments, motivations and desires, and act wisely in your interactions and dealings. As you act wisely, you and the other person will feel comfortable in each others company. In this state of rapport, you will be able to resort to cooperative management of study tasks.
- iii) Conflict can result because of several reasons. It may arise as a result of value differences, misperceptions, questions of control over resources, competition for positions and opportunities and deficient and unscientific ways of thinking.
- iv) Remembering their names, praising and encouraging them, offering them constructive criticism, handling disagreement with tact, making them feel important, reading their body language and interpreting their voice message with care are some of the ways through which you can enhance your interpersonal relationships.
- v) The various steps that conflict resolution generally involve are (a) confront the conflict, (b) understand each other's position, (c) define the problem (d) generate all possible alternatives, (e) take action and (f) evaluate the functioning. In case, it does not yield the expected result, make adjustments where necessary.

10.10 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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