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NRCYD

National Resource Center for Youth Development

Life Skills Training Tips for Caregivers

Learning life skills is an important task of childhood and adolescence. Life skills generally fall into two categories—tangible skills like job hunting, cooking, cleaning, and budgeting and intangible skills like decision-making, communication, and relationship building. Everyone needs both sets of skills.

When young people learn to cook a meal, change a tire, or manage a bank account, they are also learning how to plan, problem-solve, and make decisions. These are the skills they need to learn on the way to adulthood. Young people benefit when you share your knowledge and provide life skills practice opportunities. When youths' knowledge and ability increases, so does their self-esteem.

When do I start? Learning life skills starts at a very young age. Some people say it starts at birth. The learning process begins when you first come in contact with a youth, regardless of his/her age.

Where do I start? Find something that the youth you are working with is interested in learning about, like cooking or decorating. Or, select a goal that the youth would like to pursue like saving for a video game. Through conversation or observation, assess how much the youth already knows about the skills involved.

How do I teach? Think of teaching as a two-part process. The first part involves imparting knowledge so the youth has an understanding of the skill; the second part involves practice, practice, and more practice.

What are intangible skills? Problem solving, planning, decision-making, time management, communication, and interpersonal relations are all examples of intangible skills. They are said to be intangible because they are less visible. These skills take longer to teach; they are harder to learn; and they are very important.

How do I teach intangible skills? These skills can be taught at the same time you are working on tangible skills like cooking, budgeting, or how to get a summer job. Cooking and budgeting both involve planning and decision-making. Use the same two-part process to teach these skills. Part one, share your knowledge about and techniques for planning and decision-making that you have learned; part two, provide the youth with opportunities to practice. When it is time to work on another skill like job-hunting, remind the youth what they have already learned about planning and decision-making and teach them strategies for communication and interpersonal relationships. Provide lots of opportunity for practice.

What if I am working with a youth who can't master a skill I have taught? Before you and the youth become frustrated, take some time to evaluate:

- **Does your youth need more practice?** Learning takes place over time. Very few life skills can be mastered in a single session.
- **Is the skill too complicated?** Some skills must be broken down into smaller, more manageable pieces. Make sure the learning is challenging but not overwhelming.
- **Do you need to change your teaching methods?** Not everyone learns the same way. Some people need to see things; some people need to hear things; some people experience things. Adjust your strategies and try again.

Baking a Cake

To bake a cake, you need to follow a recipe. Even a cake mix requires additional ingredients. Does the youth know how to measure ingredients, break eggs, use a mixer or food processor, prepare the pan, turn on the oven, and determine when the cake is done? These are all steps in the recipe.

Each step provides an opportunity for you to share your knowledge. Find opportunities for the youth to practice using what you have taught. "Here's how to break an egg, now you try."

What if I don't feel confident teaching a particular skill? You can always partner with someone in the community to teach the skills with which you are not comfortable.

You may also want to enroll the youth in programs that will help him/her develop new skills. Look at the programs available in your community through the park and recreation department, the arts council, and your local youth development programs. Support the youth's participation in after school activities and activities available through the local Department of Social Services.

Tips for Teaching
· Select a time to teach when you are not feeling rushed or pressured.
· Make learning fun.
· Look for "teachable moments"—opportunities that arise in everyday life to learn about or practice a skill.
· Don't make every moment a "teachable moment."
· Ask the youth to select the skills he/she wants to learn.
· Provide lots of opportunity to practice.
· Take the youth with you when you go grocery shopping or stop by the hardware store.
· Pay attention to how the youth likes to learn.
· Ask the youth to teach you a skill.
· Ask the youth to teach another child a skill.
· Open a bank account with the youth.
· Talk to others to get new and interesting ideas for teaching life skills.

Where can I find more information about teaching life skills? There are many free resources available on the Internet to help you teach and young people learn life skills. Look for your state's independent living program website or contact your state's independent living coordinator to learn about the resources that are available in your jurisdiction

Contact Us:

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