

# The Life Skills Handbook

## Sections ONE and TWO Download 1 of 8

An active learning handbook for working  
with children and young people



By Clare Hanbury  
November 2009

Text © Clare Hanbury 2008  
Design © Clare Hanbury 2008

**Written by Clare Hanbury [www.lifeskillshandbooks.com](http://www.lifeskillshandbooks.com)**  
**Illustrated by Dandi Palmer [www.dandi.me.uk](http://www.dandi.me.uk)**

November 2008

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

**Original copyright for *Lifeskills: An active learning handbook for working with street children* © VSO 2002**

Every reasonable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the contents of this publication and to ensure that the publication does not suggest practices which might be dangerous. However VSO accept no liability for any injury to persons or property arising from the use to which any information in the text is put.

## CONTENTS

### **Introduction: The purpose of this handbook**

How to use this book

Definitions

Lifeskills and children's rights

### **Section One: What are life skills and why are they important?**

What are life skills?

The needs of children and young people

How life skills help

Organising life skills programmes

### **Section Two: Planning, managing and implementing a life skills programme**

Introducing a lifeskills programme

Planning a life skills programme

How to organise the order of topics

Planning an individual life skills session

Approaches to teaching

Tips and tools for life skills educators

Training for life skills educators

### **Section Three: Life skills Activities**

Introduction

General monitoring questions

## Part One: Where Are We Now?

Ground rules		
<b>Self Awareness</b>	Activity 1: special me	
	Activity 2: my place on the tree	
	Activity 3: the timeline	
<b>Identity factors</b>	Activity 4: What are identity factors?	
	Activity 5: making changes easier using our identity factors	
<b>Influences</b>	Activity 6: what is my network of relationships?	
	Activity 7: adverts and media	
<b>Friendships</b>	Activity 8: what is a friend?	
	Activity 9: being a friend	
	Activity 10: circles of friendship	
	Activity 11: resolving conflicts in a friendship	
	Activity 12: negotiating roles and responsibilities in a group	
<b>Communication Activities</b>	Activity 13: missing the message	
	Activity 14: body language	
	Activity 15: mime the lie	
	Activity 16: I see. Do you see?	
	Activity 17: drawing together	
	Activity 18: listening well	
	Activity 19: you and I	
	Activity 20: how assertive are you?	
	Activity 21: negotiation	
	Activity 22: saying no	
	Activity 23: fight and flight	

## Part Two: Moving Forward?

<b>Rights</b>	Activity 24: rights and responsibilities	
<b>Problem-</b>	Activity 25: identifying our problems	

<b>solving</b>	Activity 26: what risks do we take and why?	
<b>Decision-making</b>	Activity 27: the three C's in decision-making	
	Activity 28: practising making decisions	
<b>Taking Harmful Substances</b>	Activity: 29: what do I think about substance abuse	
	Activity 30: responsibility and consequences (drugs and alcohol)	
	Activity 31: peer pressure	
	Activity 32: avoiding risks	
<b>Sexuality</b>	Activity 33: let's talk about it	
	Activity 34: love and sex	
	Activity 35: the myths	
	Activity 36 bad touch	
	Activity 37: fleet of hope	
	Activity 38: islands of the future	
<b>Behaviour that Hurts</b>	Activity 39: what makes me angry?	
	Activity 40: what happens to us when we get angry	
	Activity 41: helping to sort out conflict	
	Activity 42: spiralling into trouble	
<b>Discrimination</b>	Activity 43: gender roles in society and in the group	
	Activity 44: coping with discrimination	

**Part Three: Our Future**

<b>Goal Setting</b>	Activity 45: returning to the tree of life	
	Activity 46: setting short term goals	
	Activity 47: reaching the goal	
<b>A Stronger Me</b>	Activity 48: resisting pressure using SWISH	
	Activity 49: preparing for the unexpected	
<b>Coping with Emotions</b>	Activity 50: emotional pressure	
	Activity 51: attack and avoid	
	Activity 52: stress	
	Activity 53: fear and courage	
	Activity 54: breaking the cycle of hurt	
<b>Preparation for Relationships</b>	Activity 55: long term, intimate relationships	
	Activity 56: the job of being a parent	
<b>Endings and Beginnings</b>	Activity 57: making a stronger me	
	Activity 58: where am I now?	
	Activity 59: my timeline/lifeline	
	Activity 60: my new network	
	Activity 61: moving on	
<b>Games and closing activities</b>		

## INTRODUCTION: The purpose of this handbook

This handbook provides advice and active learning activities for teaching life skills to children and young people. It supports and guides all people who plan, manage, teach or work on formal and non-formal education programmes. It can be adapted and used in different cultural contexts worldwide.

The handbook contains practical information on:

- Approaches to teaching life skills
- Advice on how to plan and develop a life skills programme
- Teaching ideas and support for educators
- User friendly step-by-step instructions on how to conduct 61 life skills activities.

### How to use this handbook

Use this handbook:

- To support existing formal and non-formal school programmes in personal, social or health education
- To support existing life skills training programmes
- To introduce life skills into other education programmes for children, for example, literacy and numeracy classes or vocational training
- To train life skills educators or
- To develop a life skills programme where none exists.

This handbook is for people working with children and young people aged 8-16. The sessions need to be adapted to the needs, experiences of the children you work with and many people use these activities with adult groups.

The information is divided into three sections:

**Section One** explains what the handbook means by life skills and why a life skills programme is important for children and young people.

**Section Two** is for those who plan, manage and implement life skills programmes. It suggests what organisations need to do in order to support a life skills programme and gives guidance on how to set up and run an overall programme and on planning individual lifeskills sessions. It examines participatory active thinking and learning and suggests practical 'tips and tools' for educators. At the end of the section, there is a suggested schedule for a five-day lifeskills training workshop.

### Section Three

This is the longest section and contains 61 life skills activities grouped into three parts:

- Part 1: **Where are we now?** focusing on core skills;
- Part 2: **How can we move forward?** Focusing on applying life skills to present issues faced by many children and young people; and
- Part 3: **Our future** focuses on skills that prepare children for the future.

## Origins

The Lifeskills Handbook 2008 is a revised and updated version of *Lifeskills, an active learning handbook for Working with Street Children*, commissioned by Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) and published in 2002. The original handbook was inspired by a life skills programme developed by VSO and Tanzanian educators working at *Kuleana*, an organisation based in Mwanza, Tanzania. It included contributions from VSO partner organisations in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Since it was published, the handbook has been used widely internationally and in the UK (where the author is based). It has been used well beyond its target audience of street educators. For example, the handbook is being used to support work by women's groups in the Philippines and as a resource book for Personal Health and Social Education (PHSE) programmes with teenagers in schools the UK. In recent times, the book became out of print and this has provided the author with an opportunity to revise and update it and to make it available to readers in a digital format and through a print-on-demand publisher.

## About the author

Clare Hanbury is a trained teacher who has worked in classrooms in primary and secondary schools in Kenya, London and Hong Kong. For six years she worked as a full time member of staff with *The Child-to-Child Trust* based at the University of London's *Institute of Education*. The Child-to-Child Trust is a world leader in children and young people's participation in health promotion and health education. She continues her association with *The Child-to-Child Trust* up to today. She specialises in **writing** material for teachers, health workers and others, in **training**, and in providing **advice and mentoring**. She has worked in numerous developing countries and in the UK where she now lives with her husband and two children. In 2008, Clare founded the organisation, ***Young Solutions international***. Its purpose is to bring the participation of children and young people more fully and effectively into mainstream education and health services. More information and other titles by Clare Hanbury can be found on the websites:

[www.lifeskillshandbooks.com](http://www.lifeskillshandbooks.com) and at [www.youngsolutionsinternational.com](http://www.youngsolutionsinternational.com). **Other titles by**

**Clare Hanbury include:**

- *Monitoring and Evaluating Children's Participation in Health and Development: a manual for Project Managers*. October 2007. Available from [www.child-to-child.org](http://www.child-to-child.org)
- *Child-to-Child approaches to HIV and AIDS: a manual for teachers, health workers and facilitators of children and young people*. 2005. Available from [www.child-to-child.org](http://www.child-to-child.org)



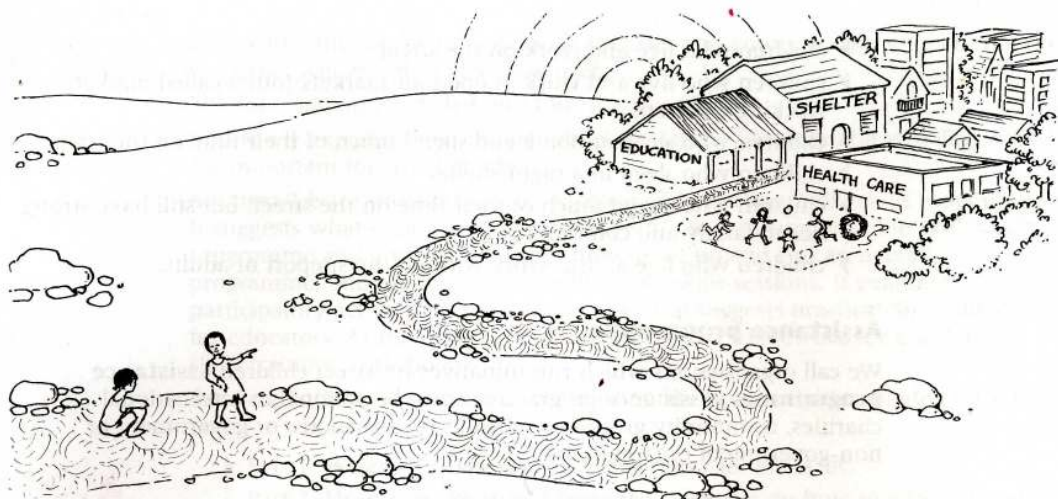
## Definitions

Before we start, let's define how we use certain terms in this handbook.

- **Programmes:** The groups helping children and young people are referred to in this handbook as **programmes**. Programmes may be schools, national or international charities, community groups or religious organisations or government or non-government organisations.
- **Educators:** People working with children may be called *mentors, counsellors, social workers, trainers, teachers, youth workers, facilitators* or **educators**. In this handbook, we use the term **educators** for anyone who is teaching or working with young people.
- **Children:** In this book we refer to the participants in life skills activities as children. Many people will use this book and the activities with adults to great effect.
- **Session:** A period of training time can be called a *lesson* or sometimes a *meeting*. We use the term **session**.
- **Life skills:** We explain what we mean by life skills in **Section One**.

## Life skills and Children's Rights

The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN CRC, 1989) which has been approved by 191 countries, explains how societies can enable children to develop well. It lists: the services children should be **provided** with (including health, education, a chance to play); the factors that children need to be **protected** from (for example, exploitation and abuse); and the need for the children to **participate** in decisions that effect them. For many children, this may seem like a distant dream. However securing these rights is the most fundamental change needed for children. We believe that achieving these rights should be the ultimate goal of every programme. A life skills programme is a pathway to this goal.



***We should be realistic in our programming but idealistic in our vision for children's futures.'***

Sarah Thomas de Benitez, describing the approach of Juconi, Mexico

## SECTION ONE

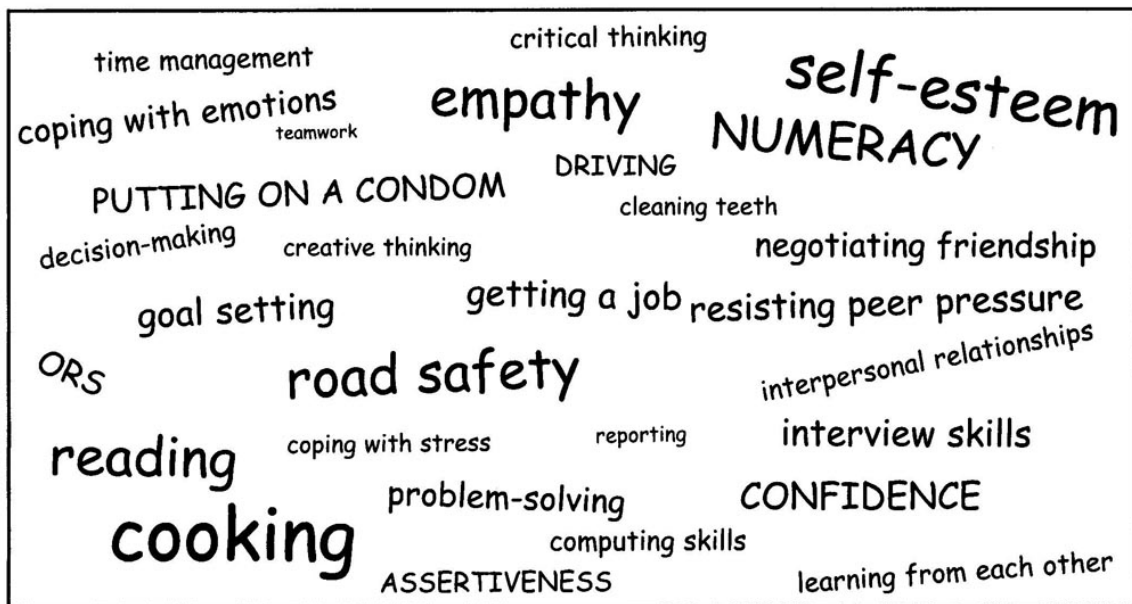
### What are life skills and how can they meet the needs of children and young people?

#### What are life skills?

This section looks at some different ways of thinking about life skills and explains the definition and approach we use in this handbook.

#### What are life skills?

A group of educators made this list in a workshop when they were asked: What are life skills?



Many of these skills are not *life skills* as we use the term in this handbook. They are:

- *technical* skills (how to cross a road safely)
- *health* skills (how to brush your teeth)
- *livelihood* skills, such as time management.

These skills may be helpful in life, but they are not what we call 'lifeskills' in this handbook

In this book, we use the World Health Organisation's (WHO) definition of lifeskills:

***“Life skills are abilities that help us to adapt and behave positively so that we can deal effectively with the challenges of everyday life.”***

Using this definition, we can separate the life skills from the other types of skills, like this:

<b>Life skills</b>	<i>Decision-making, goal setting, problem-solving, coping with stress, coping with emotions, negotiating, friendship, interpersonal relationships, empathy (concern for others), critical thinking, creative thinking, resisting peer pressure, assertiveness</i>
<b>Livelihood skills</b>	<i>Time management, getting a job, interview, computer, cooking, driving etc</i>
<b>Learning skills</b>	<i>Reading, reporting, numeracy etc</i>
<b>Technical/ health skills</b>	<i>Cleaning teeth, condom, road safety, giving oral rehydration etc</i>
<b>Outcomes of life skills</b>	<i>Teamwork, self-esteem, learning from each other, confidence etc</i>

The most important life skills are grouped into five related areas. They are called the core skills. Here is a list of the areas and one example of how each core skill is developed in a life skills session:

### The five core life skills and examples of a life skills activity

<b>1</b>	Decision-making	A group of children decide with the educator to give up smoking and help others do the same. They set goals to encourage themselves and each other and try to think what problems and benefits may happen.
	Problem-solving	A group of older boys shout at and threaten two girls. The girls have to work out whose help to seek if this happens again.
<b>2</b>	Critical thinking	A girl is able to assess the risks involved in accepting an invitation from a male stranger to accept a lift across the town.
	Creative thinking	A young person is able to think about different future job options and to think how to work towards these options
<b>3</b>	Communication & Interpersonal relationships	A child is able to discuss problems with parents or an appropriate adult A child is able to resist peer pressure when his friends ridicule his refusal to drink alcohol
	Self-awareness	A young woman develops an awareness of her sexual feeling and how these feelings can 'take over' sensible decisions. This awareness helps her avoid situations where she might risk unsafe sex.
<b>4</b>	Empathy	A group of children think about how they can help a disabled child who is alone a lot.
	Coping with Stress & Emotion	A child learns how to cope with the conflicting pressures of needing to work and wanting to study A boy learns to cope with the anger he feels towards his abusive father

In Section Three, each activity develops one or more of these five core life skills.

## Why are life skills important for children and young people?

Life skills are important because they give children and young people more control to improve their lives. We all want the life skills programme to work and have an impact on the behaviour and choices made by the children. It's important that while focusing teaching life skills that we keep an eye on three other key areas that work with lifeskills to make it work. These four key areas work like the wheels on the bus... they must all be pumped up and in good shape for the bus to move forward! These four areas are:

### 1. **Information:**

Of the right kind, at the right time, taught in the right way

### 2. **Life skills/Ability to act**

If a child is taught that abstaining from sex is important and has skills to support this then it will be easier for her to make safe healthy choices e.g.

- Resisting peer pressure
- Knowing about and being able to avoid risky situations
- Knowing how to seek help if an adult is harassing her for sex
- Negotiating with a boyfriend who is putting pressure on her to have sex

### 3. **Motivation**

If a child feels motivated to act on the information s/he knows and has the skills to do so then it is more likely to happen. Motivation can come from outside or inside a person. Strong family, spiritual or peer values can provide motivation and inspiration!

### 4. **Environment**

Supportive external influences of peers, family, school, community, society as a whole, cultural and religious influences, media, government policy and law

Here are some ideas on what to do to for each of these four key areas:

#### 1. **Information**

- Fact sheets, text books and story books with accurate content
- Radio and TV shows
- Factual component of leaning sessions in formal or non-formal settings

#### 2. **Life skills/Ability to act**

Sessions to develop lifeskills as main strategy in learning sessions within or outside formal learning settings. These need to be delivered in a fun and engaging way.

#### 3. **Motivation**

- Parent education
- Community meetings where strategies are discussed and where children's ideas and feeling could be given a voice
- 'Health safe choices' being advocated by other children come into contact with
- Religious or spiritual education where appropriate

#### 4. **Environment**

- Child protection policies or ideals known about and promoted in all settings where children learn, live and gather (see a sample CPP at the back of the handbook).
- Life skills messages (e.g. condom use, regular STD check ups) supported by children being able to access services.
- Law and police support to act upon reports of sexual abuse

## Do life skills programmes work?

NOT ON THEIR OWN THEY DON'T! When making claims for the success (or failure) of a life skills programme it is important to factor in what else is going on to influence the behaviour of the children. Children will be strongly influenced by the ideas and values practised around them at home and in their community. A life skills programme that considers these and involves key people in the children's lives will have more impact than one that does not.

Much HIV/Aids education (and other health education) focuses only on giving information with the view to changing behaviour without considering individuals values and beliefs, the environment in which they live and the skills they have to have to make those changes. When activities involve these other factors, change becomes more likely.

Different groups and societies place different emphasis on individual actions and values and on group actions and values.

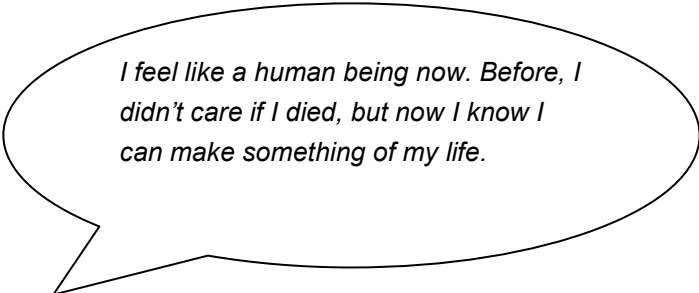


*Our external relationships also make us unique*

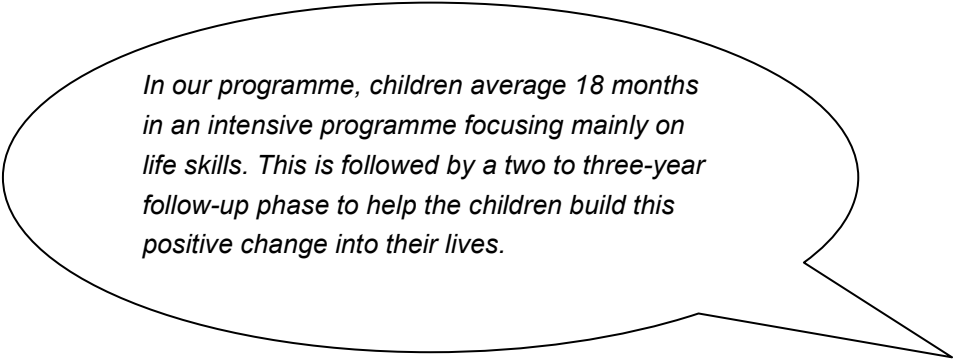
## How life skills can help children

- Many children live in circumstances that makes them especially vulnerable and limits their choices and future potential
- Life skills learning does not change events, but helps children to cope better with these events and enrich the world they live in
- Life skills learning should help children become more aware of:
  - what they are doing
  - how they are doing things
  - how they obtain information
  - how they think, feel and behave
- With better understanding about themselves and others, they can make better choices.

- A sensitive educator can help children look deep inside themselves, discover causes for problems and start to develop positive behaviour.



*I feel like a human being now. Before, I didn't care if I died, but now I know I can make something of my life.*



*In our programme, children average 18 months in an intensive programme focusing mainly on life skills. This is followed by a two to three-year follow-up phase to help the children build this positive change into their lives.*

**Please note!** The task of teaching life skills to children who face hurdles in their personal development is not easy. Educators must be prepared for the time it takes children to use and improve upon their life skills, programmes (and their funders) must be patient.

## Section Two

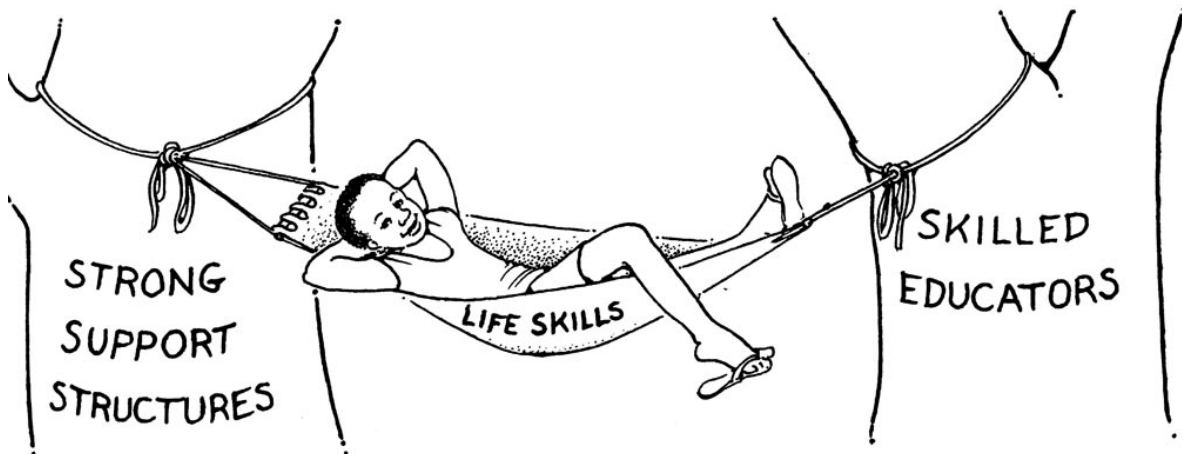
# Planning, Managing and Implementing a Life Skills Programme

This section provides guidance on how to plan and develop a life skills programme and gives advice to educators on session planning and teaching methods. It explains what is meant by active thinking and learning and describes teaching methods that promote it. There are practical tips and tools for educators.

### Fitting life skills with an overall approach

There are many types of programmes for children with different aims, philosophical approaches and styles of working. It is possible to teach life skills separately or alongside literacy, vocational skills health and hygiene education or other elements.

To work well a life skills programme needs to have a **strong support structure** and **skilled educators** to work creatively with children.



*Lifeskills programmes need support structures and skilled educators.*

### What are strong support structures?

- 1. An organisation with a clear purpose**
  - The organisation has a statement of purpose or mission
  - The organisation has policies, systems and procedures
  - Staff have a clear understanding of the organisation's purpose and objectives
- 2. A strong management system**
  - Staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities (contracts and job descriptions). This is important for both paid and voluntary workers
  - There is a clear salary structure based on qualifications and experience
  - Staff meetings are held regularly and there are clear communication channels between staff and managers
  - All staff members are made aware of and can contribute to the development of new programmes such as a life skills programme

### 3. **Staff development opportunities**

- There are opportunities for staff training, assessment and promotion

### 4. **Systems to monitor and evaluate its work**

- There is basic 'baseline' information to establish a starting point for the lifeskills and other programmes. This is essential so that progress can be measured.
- Educators involve children in evaluating the sessions and the programme
- Managers have formal and informal methods of checking the progress of the programme (for example, meetings both with the children and the staff involved), questionnaires, quick chats etc)
- Programmes are regularly reviewed

### 5. **Funds to cover the basic costs of new programmes**

- The costs of life skills materials - handbooks and stationery
- The costs of training
- The costs of more staff or extra time for existing staff to train and develop the new programme
- The costs of finding other sources of support and information to keep the programme going

## **Skilled educators**

Educators need to have or develop the following skills:

- To be able to create an appropriate lifeskills programme by being able to:
  - *Identify appropriate life skills activities for their group*
  - *Adapting life skills activities for their group*
- To listen to children in a non-judgmental way
- To encourage children to work positively with others in a group
- To deal positively with children who behave in an aggressive manner
- To create a trusting atmosphere in which children feel able to express their feelings
- To help each child feel they are making progress
- To use teaching methods that help children express themselves.
- To create and use monitoring and evaluation tools on a regular basis
- To ask for support when they need it

See [www.youngsolutionsinternational.com](http://www.youngsolutionsinternational.com) for further information on the 'Building Foundations' course. This develops educators' confidence and communication skills in working well with young people.

## **Stability**

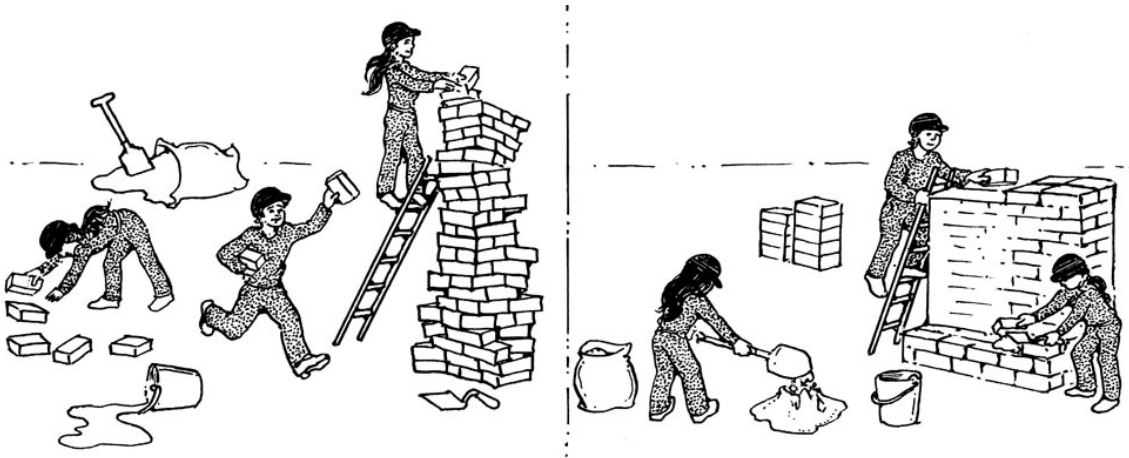
A sense of stability is important, especially if working with vulnerable groups who live disordered lives. For example:

- Activities take place at regular times
- Staff work together to create a sense of order
- There is enough funding to meet basic costs for the programme at least 2 years
- There are managers and educators who plan to stay in the organisation for at least two years
- The learning environment is safe, peaceful and tidy to enable staff and children to conduct activities effectively
- There are partnerships with other organisations to share support and information
- The local community understand and support the activities



## Planning a life skills programme

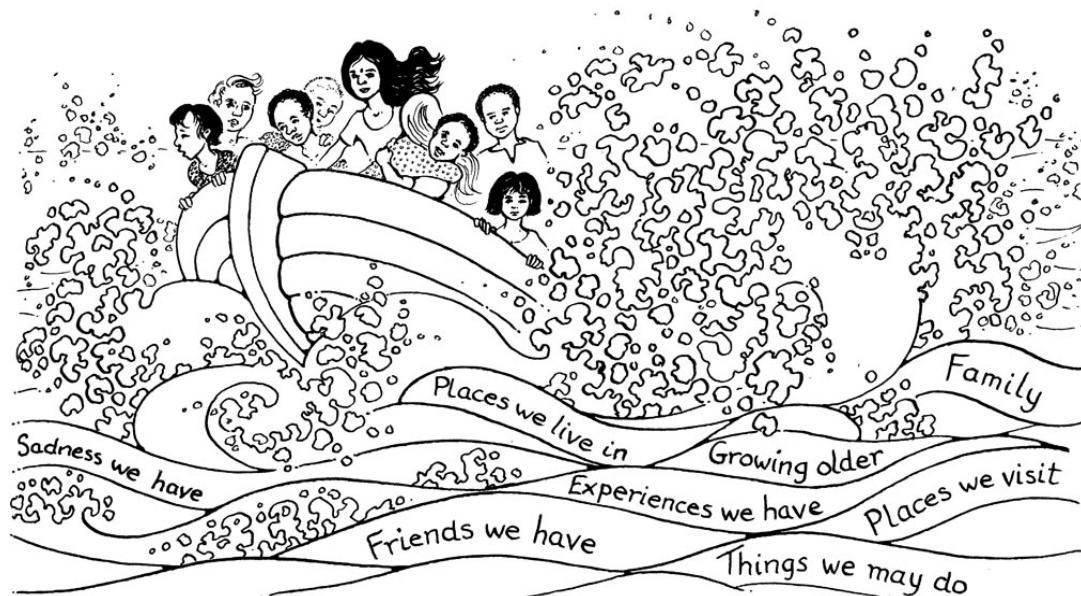
It is important to develop a life skills programme slowly and steadily. The strong support structure (see previous section) is a foundation on which the life skills programme is built.



*Don't be tempted to build your lifeskills programme too quickly. Building slowly and steadily will make the programme stronger.*

When you are at the planning stage, and before planning the topics themselves, take the following steps:

- Identify the needs of the children with whom you are working.
- Reach a common understanding of life skills among all those involved (managers, donors, programme staff, educators, children, parents and community members).
- Generate support for the life skills programme from all involved.
- Identify life skills learning opportunities already offered to children (formally and informally).
- Assess whether life skills activities can be combined with existing activities or whether to set up a new programme.
- Decide when and how often life skills sessions take place. Again, this may be within an existing learning programme or separate from it.
- Agree aims and objectives for the life skills programme.
- Decide what needs to be made before the life skills programme can begin for example:
  - set up additional training for educators
  - buy materials to support the programme
  - plan the life skills sessions.
- Decide how the programme might be monitored and evaluated.



*Find out about the children's lives: each child's needs is different*

## **How to organise the order of topics**

The most common way to organise life skills topics is to start with issues around the self, family and the immediate environment, and then move outward to wider social issues and finally to issues to do with the children's future.

The activities in Section Three are grouped in this way:

Part 1: Where are we now?

Part 2: Moving forward

Part 3: Our future

When planning your life skills programme, look first at any life skills activities being done in an existing school or programme. Then they need to think about the opportunities there are to increase or strengthen these existing activities. Then look at the topics in this handbook and select the relevant ones. This can be done in a training workshop, by self-study, in a meeting with other colleagues or a combination of these.

Planning a life skills programme **TAKES TIME**. The educator needs to be able to spend time planning the sessions, discussing it with colleagues and trying things out. One programme suggests that for six months, 20% of the educator's time should be spent on this task!

The *Butterflies Programme* in India, who tested some of the activities in the handbook, commented: '*Encourage organisations to select the activities that they find fit together best, that can be facilitated with their children in a logical sequence, in a time available for maximum benefit.*' They introduced many of the activities they tested using puppets and picture cards. They found that these methods helped to catch the children's interest and attention.

## **Planning a life skills session**

A life skills session is the block of time the educator has with the children to conduct a life skills activity or activities. A life skills session may have more than one activity depending on the time available, on the activity chosen and the methods used to conduct the activity. When selecting an activity the educators must try to build on the content and outcomes of the previous session. Sometimes this might mean selecting an activity that will help to

address a specific problem that arose. Educators should note interesting comments made by children and \*use these to plan other lifeskills work. An educator's plan for a life skills session may have the following framework. The timings are a guideline only. For example, you may want to spend longer than 5-10 mins on an introductory activity and less time on the main activity.

### **Sample Life skills Session Plan (60 mins)**

#### **Purpose of the session**

*Think about the skills that you want the children to have by the end of the session.*

#### **Introduction (5 mins)**

- *Think about how you will explain the purpose of the session to the children and if you need to relate this session to earlier sessions on related topics. Write down brief point to remind you of the main points to make when you introduce the topic.*
- *Write here how you will conduct an introductory activity and how long it will take*

#### **Activity/Activities (45 mins)**

- *Write down the materials needed and each step*
- *Try to imagine how long each step will take*
- *Use the handbook as a guide, you may want to change steps or change the methods you use*

#### **End of session discussion (5 mins)**

*Write down the questions you will ask what the children learned and the effects of the activities on each child*

#### **Closing activity (5 mins)**

*If you think the topic may have been difficult or stressful for the children, do a light-hearted fun activity to change the mood!*

**Notes:** *At the end of the session write down any thoughts you had about the session and nay comments from the children. Use this to decide what you will change next time you use the activity and to plan the next session. Note how the children were affected.*

### **Adapting an activity**

Educators need to select and adapt the activities o their culture and to their specific life skills programme. Read through the activities in Section Three and decide:

- *Can I use this activity as it is?*
- *Do I need to adapt it? If so, how?*
- *Can I combine it with other activities from this topic?*
- *Can I combine it with another part of the learning programme?*

The decision will usually be based on:

- *The purpose of the learning programme*
- *The purpose of the life skills programme*
- *The needs of the children (their age and stage)*
- *The confidence and skills of the educator*
- *Logistics (how long the session is, where it is, when it is etc)*

Depending on the answers to these questions, the educator can plan a life skills session that uses one or more of the life skills activities.

In life skills learning the experience of the children matters more than the age. The important thing is to adapt the activities to the needs of the group. However, do not **underestimate** what the children can do. This is a common mistake.

## Teaching a life skills session

### Teaching methods

Children respond well to methods that make them think in an active way. Younger children like to move physically and can learn well 'on their feet'. The learning programme needs to meet their needs. It is important that educators have experience of (or understand) active thinking and learning methods.

Methods for teaching life skills activities	
<i>Group discussions</i>	<i>Feedback</i>
<i>Picture cards</i>	<i>Puppets</i>
<i>Surveys</i>	<i>Silent reflection</i>
<i>Role play</i>	<i>Out of class projects</i>
<i>Games and exercises</i>	<i>Interviews</i>
<i>Drawing</i>	<i>Reading quietly</i>

### Active thinking and learning

You can see from the list of methods above, that active learning does not always mean being active. A child can learn or think actively while reading quietly, listening to others speaking or while writing. Active thinking and learning means that the child responds while learning. They do not just receive information passively. Active learning encourages children to think for themselves, to develop ideas and to suggest possible solutions. They can then apply the knowledge and skills in their life. This is different from teaching methods where the teacher talks and the child receives information in a passive way. If children simply repeat and memorise information given to them by the teacher, they may not know what it means and they may not be able to apply the knowledge in their own life. This does not develop life skills.

While planning, teaching, and reflecting on life skills learning and teaching, the educator needs to remember that change will come about by building on children's life skills in a way that recognises who they are and how the child will use and practise the skills.



### Coping with powerful emotions

In life skills learning, the educator will want to encourage children to express themselves at a deep level. Many children do not find it easy to respond to direct questions about feelings. In some of the activities, it is suggested that children draw symbols or representations of their thoughts as a record for further discussions. This is especially useful if the children are not literate. When skills are new to children, it may be best to have a special session in which you show how symbols can represent thoughts and feelings.

## **Confidentiality**

It is important that both the educators and the children understand clearly what is confidential and what is not. During the life skills sessions, the children need to know when it is safe to talk about their feelings. A good general rule is that most information in the life skills sessions should be kept confidential.

However, there may be exceptions to this. Some children are subjected to sexual, physical, emotional abuse by adults or by their peers. It is therefore very important for programmes to have a clear policy to guide educators on what to do if a child reveals a serious problem, for example, sexual abuse by an adult. Some programmes have a policy which requires educators to report all instances of abuse to a government body such as social services or the police.

If the educator promises confidentiality to the child, the educator must tell the child this. The educator must explain that if the child reveals a problem, the educator has to act. It is important that the child consents to and participates in whatever action is taken. It is also important that the child is supported in whatever decision s/he takes. The child might need additional one-to-one support and counselling.

During a life skills programme, educators will encounter strong emotions and distressing situations which the children face and talk about. Educators need to support each other to cope with this.

## Tips and tools for life skills educators

The effectiveness of life skills learning depends greatly on the abilities of the life skills educator and their relationship with the children. This section gives guidance on how the educator can create a safe environment for learning to take place and tips and tools the educators have developed and found to work well.

### ***Creating a safe learning environment***

#### ***Where?***

- *A place that children want to be*

#### ***When?***

- *A time when they want to gather*
- *For long enough*
- *At regular intervals*

#### ***Who?***

##### *The children*

- *In mixed age and mixed ability groups, children learn well from each other*
- *Gender sensitive topics may require single sex groups but all gender-sensitive issues benefit from mixed sex debate*
- *Particular 'problems' may need separate work within a particular group*
- *Small groups: no more than 15 children per educator (bigger groups can work well if peer educators support the adult educator).*

##### ***The educator***

- *Appreciates the need for life skills work*
- *Communicates well with the children*
- *Understands the children's circumstances*
- *Understands and responsive to the cultural norms about who children can talk to, when and about what*
- *Talks to the children in a language that they want to use*
- *Talks with the children as equals and not at the children as a superior*
- *Listens well to what children are saying and hears what they are not saying*
- *Is non-judgemental*
- *Respects children's views and backgrounds*
- *Encourages respect among children before , during and after the session*
- *Allows all children in a group to have a say and uses methods to involve quieter children (e.g. girls in a mixed sex group)*
- *Thinks about the benefits of lifeskills activities when alone and when with the children and manage.*

- 1. Life skills sessions belong to the children and to you**  
The best sessions are a partnership between what the children need from the session and can bring to it and the support that the educators can give the children through structure and guidance.
- 2. The educator is the children's partner in life skills learning**  
Let go of the power and control that an educator is the teacher who controls the children and the learning. Life skills learning depends on what the children and the educator bring to the sessions and how they develop.
- 3. Listen well but don't try too hard**  
Children know when you are listening too them. Don't try to be the perfect professional listener: this is another way to control. Admit any problems and weaknesses you have and negotiating a solutions with the children.
- 4. Children know themselves and their lives best**  
Respect their experience

## Tools

- 1. Establish ground rules for life skills sessions**  
Ground rules can help life skills sessions work well. It is best if the educator and the group of children can create them together. Express rules that focus on the positive behaviour, for example: *We arrive on time; not don't be late!*  
  
Here are some important issues for which it is good to agree rules:
  - dealing with negative comments
  - dealing with children interrupting or talking on top of each other
  - respecting a person's right *not* to speak
  - sticking to the topic
  - confidentiality and trust: what is said during the session stays in the session.Make a **Ground Rules** poster and display it at each life skills session to remind everyone of the rules and refer to them if necessary. If there are many changes in the group, it is important to have a short discussion on the rules so that all children in the group understand and follow them. See Section Three for a session plan on how to set ground rules.
- 2. Use physical movement to support learning**  
Using physical movement in activities improves life skills learning. This is learning by doing: if children can physically 'do' something which is related to the learning point, they will remember it better. *For example*, rather than saying *I agree* or *I disagree*, the children move to an *I agree* or *I disagree* positions in the room.
- 3. Questions and comments**  
At the end of each session, ask children for their questions and comments before asking them specific questions on the activity. Try to get into the habit of this even if the children do not say anything at first. This will help to build their confidence.
- 4. Dealing with painful topics**  
The educator can use imaginative communication tools to help the children think about and discuss intensely personal and other painful issues. It is important to put the issue into a bigger picture. This helps the children to see the painful discussion as part of a bigger process, moving towards a positive outcome. For example: **the snail**: This visualisation technique helps the children reflect on their progress during a lifeskills programme. When the children start the life skills learning, they imagine they are a snail

inside its shell. During the life skills learning, the children come out of their snail's shell. When they complete the life skills learning, the children imagine how their skills and identities have grown. They reflect on how it was possible to fit into that small snail's shell!

#### 5. Provide feedback to the children

**The feedback sandwich:** This is a positive way educators can give feedback to individuals or groups:

- something positive.
- something to think more about/to improve upon
- something positive

For example:

- *That was an imaginative idea*
- *Now spend a few minutes thinking of an example from your own life*
- *You spoke very clearly, well done.*

#### 6. Encourage respect in the group

Encourage the children to say after expressing an opinion about something. '*And that's me*'. This helps children learn that everyone has their own unique view of the world. For example, *I think that girls and boys should be treated equally, and that's me!*

#### **I liked what you said about...**

In a discussion, before criticising or adding to an opinion, encourage children to say first what they liked about the idea (even how it was said, when it was said). For example, '*I liked what you said about smoking and I agree that it stops me feeling hungry. But I think smoking is bad for our bodies and that we should stop*'. The children could add, '*and that's us*', if you have taught them this technique!

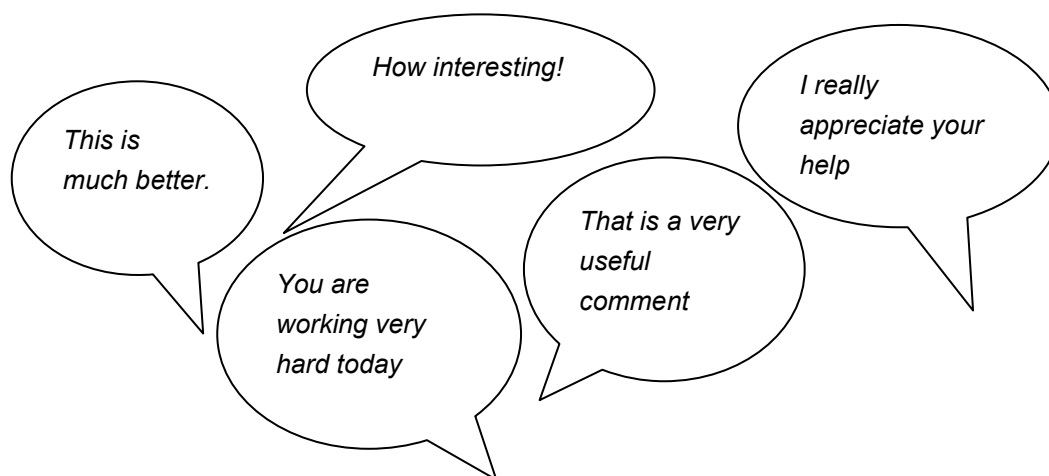
#### 7. Bad behaviour, not bad person

This is an important point and the educator can teach this to the children: it is a child's **behaviour** that is bad; it is not the child, the **person** who is bad. The children should feel that 'being bad' is not part of an unchanging identity. Reinforce this by using words which focus on the behaviour and not the person. For example, *Shouting at others is not helpful.*



## 8. Give praise and recognition

Praise and recognition should focus on the children's efforts and improvement. Give sincere praise to children as often as possible.



## 9. Avoid value judgements

Use value-free language to deal constructively with difficult situations and controversial issues (and continue to highlight unacceptable words or behaviour). This useful phrase responds to hurtful words or behaviour in a value-free way which reduces conflict.

- *When you say/do X ... I feel Y ... because Z ...*
- *When you interrupt me, I feel annoyed because I want you to hear what I have to say.*

Educators can teach this tool to the children.

## 10. Build on the positive

Ask children to identify *what's good about x* and discuss, *How can we make x happen more or more often?*

## 11. Visualise the positive

When we say '*don't smoke*' to children we focus attention on smoking. It is better to focus messages on the positive or desirable things, for example, '*I want to be healthy*'. Try to get children to visualise the behaviour we want them to adopt.

## 12. Asking sensitive questions

If the children have the writing skills, they can write sensitive questions on pieces of paper. These questions can be put anonymously in a box. The questions can be answered in front of the group. This allows children to have sensitive questions answered without fear or embarrassment.

## 13. Create a good environment for the sessions

Use an informal style of seating. A circle or a semi-circle is good for most of the activities. If possible, sit, draw and write on the floor. Have a wall or a board that all the children can see easily to put pictures or posters. Have a simple way to attach these pictures or posters. Have enough room for children to break into small groups or pairs.

## 14. Group work

In this handbook, there is lots of group work. Use imaginative ways to divide children into groups for example the fruit salad game you will find at the end of this section. If some of the children are shy to speak, ask them to discuss things first in pairs, then share these ideas with a small group and then, if appropriate, with the whole group. You can make groups of different sizes for different reasons. Keep your group work

varied. Children can become as bored with group work, just like they can with 'chalk and talk'.

### 15. The literacy question

Groups using this book may include literate and non-literate children. Even if the majority in the group are non-literate, you can use large pieces of paper (or a flipchart) and pens or crayons to share and record ideas. Use slips of paper with tasks or posters etc as described by the activity. Children will understand the different uses of literacy by observing them and this will help to motivate and encourage them to gain more literacy skills. However, do not present large amounts of text on charts as this may act to discourage children.

### 18. Monitoring and evaluation tools

Some monitoring tools you can use in addition to the monitoring questions suggested after each activity.

#### Movement evaluation

- Set up a line of five chairs across the room. Label the chairs to indicate that they represent a range of feelings from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

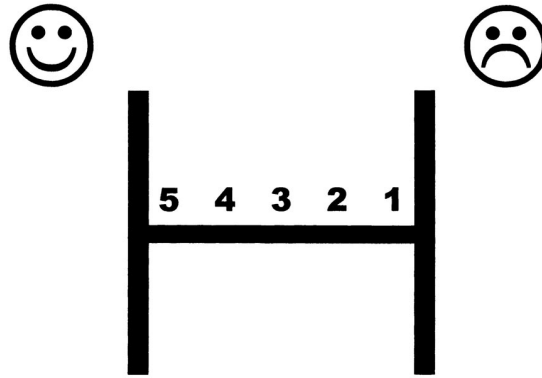
**Strongly Agree                  Agree                  Neutral                  Disagree                  Strongly Disagree**

You can use drawings of faces of the children are not literate

- Read statements such as :
  - *The lifeskills session was interesting*
  - *I understand more about (this topic) now*
- Ask the children to stand behind the chair that represents their answer to each question.
- You can also ask the children to explain why they have chosen that answer.

#### H assessment

- Divide the children into groups. The groups sit around a large piece of paper with the letter, 'H' written onto it. (see illustration below)
- Under the happy face in the left column, the children list all the things they liked about the activity/workshop/programme.
- Under the sad face in the left in the right column, the children list all the things they didn't like.
- Write a scale of 1-5 across the middle horizontal line. Ask each child to make a cross to show how good they thought the activity/workshop/programme was. (You could use pebbles or seeds instead). Work out the average score for each group and is written in the upper middle section of the 'H'.
- In the lower middle section, children are asked to list ideas for the future improvements of the workshop.
- Using the H diagram, each group feeds back their scores and their ideas. (If there are more than three groups, each group can put up their diagram and the whole group visit each others' diagrams.)



**TIP**

If the children do not write easily then do this with the whole group verbally, with the children giving their responses and the educator recording them in writing, drawing or using the agreed symbols.

# TRAINING FOR LIFE SKILLS EDUCATORS

Before starting a life skills programme, programmes should identify if they really need to train staff to begin the programme. Many programmes may think they need to train staff when in fact they need to build a better support structure for the programme. It is also important to ensure that educators have the correct skills. A well-trained teacher may not be as successful at teaching life skills to children as a semi-literate teenager who has a good relationship with the children. Each educator will have different experiences and skills, any training should be designed to fill the gaps.

This section outlines topics that could be used in a training workshop and suggests a timetable. The final design of the training workshop will depend on the needs of your programme and the skills of the educators. The workshop will take five days. The sessions can be spread out over several weeks or they can be done on consecutive days. There are advantages and disadvantages of both.

The person(s) conducting the training needs to be an experienced in life skills education and training. To increase the effectiveness of the training, plan a follow-up meeting where educators can share their ideas and plans, their problems and successes. This handbook can be used as the resource book for a training workshop.

## Day 1

### 1. What are life skills?

This session can use the example given in the handbook where participants are asked what 'skills' are 'life skills'.

- Sort out this list into different categories
- Explain the five categories of life skills
- Give examples of each life skill.

If time, it is useful to do group work in which participants think about a problem situation in which life skills are used or needed, to role play this situation and to discuss which life skills were needed to deal with the problem. For example: *A teenager is being pressured into taking drugs by his group of friends, what does he do? How does he cope? What life skills did he use? What life skills (if any) should he use? What life skills does he need to deal with this situation?*

### 2. A support structure for the life skills programme

Without a strong support structure, it is difficult for a programme to keep a life skills programme going well. In this session, participants can discuss what support is needed for life skills programmes. Then they assess the support structure of their own programmes and identify any gaps.

### 3. Understanding the children and young people in the programme

In this session, it would be useful for participants to work with children and young people to find out their needs and issues. It is best if there are more children than adults in each group. Participants can design a survey and/or some questions for a discussion with the children, then conduct this survey/discussion and report it back to the group. Participants then need to discuss the circumstances of the children in their programme and the developmental problems and needs of the children and how a programme could respond. For example, the participants can work with children and young people to complete the solutions chart.

#### The solutions chart

A problem analysis chart can be done using a number of methods such as drawing, discussion or role-play. A method that has been used successfully by a number of projects is for groups to develop charts in the following way:

1. In groups of 5-10, children and/or adults are asked to identify 3-5 problems affecting children's health in the community. For the purposes of the life skills planning, may want to make it more general.
2. In this example, the topic is HIV and AIDS and the task is to discuss what problems HIV and AIDS cause the children and the community.
3. The group identify the problems and write these in the left hand column.
4. They use a points system for example
  - 5/5 = most serious/most common and 1/1 = least serious/least common
5. They then discuss how serious each problem is and how common in their community and then allocate scores in these columns.
6. They discuss how much children can do about each of these problems and they write and score this column.
7. They total the points awarded against each problem and discuss the outcome.

<b>Problems and issues relating to HIV and AIDS in our community</b>				
<b>Problem</b>	<b>How Serious</b>	<b>How Common</b>	<b>How much can children do + examples</b>	<b>Importance</b>
People with Aids-related illnesses do not eat a healthy diet	4	4	3 Children can help raise awareness about the importance of good nutrition for people with AIDS-related illnesses.	11
Not enough teachers at school. Two have died from an AIDS-related illness	5	2	2 Children can help to raise awareness about the dangers of HIV and AIDS	9
Some children have dropped out of school to care for sick relatives	5	4	3 Children can help other children to keep up with basic school work. They can encourage children to come back to school and help to organise alternative care for relatives during school hours	12
Children do not want to be friends with children whose family members have HIV or AIDS	4	5	4 Children can learn about HIV and AIDS and learn how to support children who have family members with HIV or AIDS	13

This method helps identify a key topic or a sequence of sub-topics on a health issues. It is a simple method but one which generates useful discussion. Once the groups have completed their charts, if time and if appropriate, a whole group chart can then be created putting together the most popular ideas from all the charts. This chart method can be used with children who cannot read, using pictures or symbols for the key ideas.

## **Day 2**

### **4. Power issues: Be a guide on the side not a sage on the stage**

In this session, participants arrange themselves in order of power from those at the top of the power ladder to those lower down. If participants do not know each other well, the session can be an introductory exercise where participants exchange information

on age, jobs, family, experiences, qualifications etc. Ask each participant to explain why they chose their position. Ask where they feel children would have stand in relation to themselves and why. Encourage educators to analyse how this difference in power affects their relationships with children. Discuss the ideal relationship between a child and an educator and write down key words to describe this. Discuss how this relationship might be achieved.

**5. What skills are needed to work with the children? What are my skills, what skills do I lack? How to I learn these skills?**

Discuss the knowledge and skills educators need to work with children and draw up a list. For example, to know what life skills are; to have ideas for activities which develop life skills; and to know how to adapt activities. Ask the participants to prioritise the list. Discuss how best to gain the knowledge and skills (through training, self-study, practice with someone more experienced etc). Decide what can be included in the training workshop or, if the training timetable is already set, decide if the planned training will meet the needs of the participants or if the timetable needs to be changed.

**6. Active learning and thinking**

This session helps participants to gain a better understanding of active learning and the difference between active learning and 'being active'. The participants can discuss examples of active learning from the participants' own experiences (as learners or as teachers). They can demonstrate the differences in using active learning and using traditional methods in approaching one given issue.

**Day 3**

**7. Creating a good environment for life skills learning**

Using the ideas listed in this handbook, participants can discuss how they would create a good environment for life skills learning and how they will overcome any potential obstacles.

**8. Practising communication tools**

Using ideas from this handbook, participants role play situations in which educators are with groups of children and they use one of the teaching tools. After each role-play, participants can discuss the use and effectiveness of the tool.

**9. Teaching methods to promote active learning and life skills**

In this training session, divide participants into groups of three or four and ask them to design an activity on the topic of, '*how to be a good friend*' using one of the following methods:

- Role play
- Drawing symbols
- Puppets
- Using picture cards
- Song
- Poetry
- Story-telling

Ask each group to present their activity and as a whole group discuss the use of this method in life skills learning. Make sure that the *message(s)* which each activity presents is accurate and useful.

**10. Managing group work**

In this session, participants can share their experiences of participating in groups and managing groups. First brainstorm different ways in which to form groups then talk about the purposes of different sized groups and different ways in which feedback can be given by the groups. Remember that listening to more than 3 or 4 groups giving

feedback will send most groups to sleep! Remember also that group work can become boring if it is used all the time. Group work needs to be well planned, well focused and well managed!

## **Day 4**

### **11. A review of an existing life skills programme**

This session will vary from programme to programme. It gives participants a chance to build a timetable for life skills activities alongside existing activities in their programme. It is important to start with a few activities and to allocate plenty of time to think about and adapt the activities so that they work well.

### **12. Creating aims and objectives for a life skills programme**

It is useful for the educators to examine the overall programme aims and objectives and identify how the life skills programme links to these. Ask the participants to think about four levels of aims and objectives:

- the overall aims and objectives of the programme
- the overall aims of the life skills programme
- the specific objectives for the life skills programme
- purposes for each life skills activity.

It is useful if objectives/purposes fit the SMART criteria: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, **T**ime-tabled.

### **13. Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is an important issue for the children and it is useful to discuss this issue in as part of training. We suggest that each programme should have a clear policy on confidentiality and child protection to guide educators.

Generally, educators and children should keep things said in the lifeskills sessions confidential. However, in some cases, it may not be in the best interests of the child, for example if a child reveals sexual abuse. Any action the educator takes should be with the agreement and participation of the child. In the training session, educators can discuss different examples from their experience and how they would deal with each example.

### **14. The issue of literacy**

In this session, participants discuss the literacy levels of the children they work with and think about how they will manage mixed-ability literacy in the life skills sessions.

It is a good idea to involve those children who have literacy to help the others, but do not ask too much from them. Use large pieces of paper (or flip charts) and marker pens or crayons to draw and write. Children who have limited literacy will be motivated by the many ways in which literacy skills are used in life skills work. Teach children at an early stage of the programme to use recognise and design symbols to represent feelings and ideas.

### **15. Monitoring and evaluating life skills activities**

In the *Tips and Tools* section, some games help with evaluation. Participants can practice the games and look at the monitoring questions. They can discuss why they think such questions have been included and how they might use these questions. Clarify with participants the differences between monitoring and evaluation. (Monitoring is on-going and happens during the life skills programme, and evaluation takes place periodically during the whole life of the programme and most commonly at three stages: before, during and after the programme. Monitoring activities feed evaluation.

Collect information on the children's behaviour and skills before starting the life skills programme and again after the programme. This will show whether the life skills

programme is having a positive effect and in what areas. This information on achievements and effectiveness can help get support for the programme.

At the training event, participants can discuss what kind of information could be collected and how this might be done. It is also important that participants find out and then examine how the programme approaches its overall monitoring and evaluation. Many programmes do very little monitoring and evaluation.

You can contact the author for more resources on monitoring and evaluation at [www.lifeskillshandbooks.com](http://www.lifeskillshandbooks.com)

## **Day 5**

### **16. Selecting life skills topics**

Using this handbook for ideas, participants select up to 10 topics that meet the objectives of their programme. In pairs, participants should examine one or two of the session plans and discuss how to adapt the session to meet the needs of children in their group.

### **17. Planning and conducting a life skills session**

Using the handbook as reference and in pairs, participants select, adapt and run a life skills activity. As this can take some time, it may be useful to split the group in two for the actual demonstrations of the activities. If time does not allow, participants can present their session plans and present a small part of the session. Allow time for discussion after each presentation.

### **18. Review and evaluation of the workshop**

This is best done using a mix of verbal feedback and anonymous written feedback in response to several questions such as:

- *On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate this workshop?*
- *What knowledge, skills and ideas are you taking away*
- *What was the highlight for you?*
- *What can we improve on next time?*
- *Is there anything further that you need to help you implement a life skills programme? If so, what is it?*