



## Life Skills for Young Children

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### Life Skills?

According to the World Health Organization, life skills are

“the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior



that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.” UNICEF defined them as “a behavior change or behavior development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude and skills.” Development of life skills help people to take positive action to protect themselves and promote health and positive social relationships when they face the realities of life.

### Types of Life Skills

Necessary life skills vary by a person’s age and by culture and society. Different organizations or

researchers may list or use different types of life skills based on their target population or on a specific topic relevant to their scope of work.

Several international organizations (UNICEF,



UNESCO and WHO) list 10 life skills, including problem-

solving, critical thinking, effective communication skills, decision-making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness building skills, empathy, and coping with stress and emotions. Their life skills apply to all human beings. The Harvard Center on the Developing Child<sup>1</sup> focused on adolescent life skills development, and their list includes planning, focus, self-control, awareness and flexibility as life skills. With her commitment to young children and their families, Ellen Galinsky<sup>2</sup> guides parents and caregivers on seven essential life skills that can be promoted through

everyday moments and quality relationships with young children: focus and self-control, perspective-taking, communication, making connections, critical thinking, taking on challenges, and self-directed, engaged learning. Young children can learn these life skills through attentive and playful relationships with their families and other important adults in their lives.

### **Age-Appropriate Life Skills**

Although in the past life skills were more emphasized with adolescents<sup>3</sup>, children can develop life skills at any age that will set them up for a life of



success. There are different sets of specific life skills children must acquire at different age periods. A few online resources are listed here to help understand specific life skills by age:

[Life Skills By Age](#)<sup>4</sup>

[Life Skills Checklists](#)<sup>5</sup>

[List of Life Skills for Ages 2-18](#)<sup>6</sup>

### **Life Skills for Young Children: How Young Children Can Help**

When asked “What do you want from your child?” most parents would say, “I just want my children to be safe and happy in life.” To be safe and happy, parents/caregivers are encouraged to help children develop life skills. Life skills taught at an early age continue to be beneficial to children as they grow. Instilling good habits,

age-appropriate responsibilities and good civic sense should begin at a young age.

Many parents are overprotective of their children in their concern for safety, and this gets in the way of learning life skills. That is why we see college students who cannot do basic, essential tasks, such as doing laundry, and almost 75% of employers say that it is hard to find college graduates with life skills in the workforce<sup>7</sup>.

Our young child is more capable than we think. As a parent, for a better life for our kids, we have to equip them for the great big world with life skills. How do we start and what can we teach?

### *Start From the Little Things*

It is better to start from the little things, such as teaching them how to crack an egg, make their bed, clear the table, etc. Children have to have



some responsibilities, and chores help children learn them. Some helpful age-appropriate chores are listed below:

Ages 2 -3: Put toys away, fill pet’s food

dish, put clothes in hamper, wipe up spills, dust, pile their books.

Ages 4-5: Make their bed, empty trash cans, bring in mail, clear the table, use a hand-held vacuum to pick up crumbs, water flowers, unload utensils from dishwasher, wash plastic dishes at the sink, fix a bowl of cereal.

### *Do it Myself!*

We hear a lot from our young children, “I can do it by myself.” So, let them do it themselves! Parents can let children pick out an ice cream flavor, choose which dress to wear, or which toys to buy. This may sound basic, but it helps them practice making choices. Do not decide for your child what they like and do not like, and do not decide what they can and cannot do. Even young children can make their own decisions. Parents can teach rewards and consequences of making good and bad choices to guide children. Let your child make decisions under the guidance and safety of parents.

### *Talking and Listening*

It is important to highlight the importance of two-way communication.



Children at an early age need to know how to talk and listen. Children can build these skills by engaging in a conversation as often as possible. Parents also need to be a role model by paying attention to children when they are talking and responding in a timely manner.

### *Take Care of Self*

Teaching children about health and basic hygiene is very important. Remember to consider their age and development level. For younger children, see if they can blow their nose, brush their hair or get their own drink.

Make sure they can reach all necessary items to complete the task. If children are having a difficult time brushing their teeth or washing their hands, try breaking the task into smaller steps. With parents’ guidance, children can establish healthy habits over time.

### *Concept of Time*

Children experience the change of time at a very early age and start to understand time perception as early as 4 months of age<sup>8</sup>. Three-year-old children can have similar time perception as adults. To help children understand the value of time, teach children through doing. Set start and end times on a clock for simple household chores or timed play activities. Read the clock with them when necessary. Once children understand the concept of time, it will be easier to teach them how to schedule their activities and tasks accordingly.

### *Cooking Together*



Encourage children to help out in the kitchen. Children as young as 3 years old can spread peanut

butter on bread or sprinkle cheese over the pasta. Young children can also easily learn how to use basic kitchen tools. Getting children involved in cooking is an excellent way to teach healthy food choices and independence.

## Teaching Value of Money



Don't feel bad about saying no when children want to buy more toys or treats. Young

children need to learn the value of money and how to save and spend wisely at an early age. That way, parents can support their child to be financially literate and help set the stage for smart money decisions.

## Conclusion

Parents can play an important role in teaching their children the skills to be successful in life, and now is the best time to do it. The earlier children learn life skills, the more developed and independent they will be by the time children reach high school and beyond. It is never too early to start. Given the opportunities and encouragement, young children will learn and demonstrate age-appropriate life skills, continue practicing those skills and develop new skills.

## References

<sup>1</sup>. [https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/HCDC\\_BuildingAdolescentCoreLifeSkills.pdf](https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/HCDC_BuildingAdolescentCoreLifeSkills.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>. Galinsky, E. (2010). *Mind in the making: the seven essential life skills every child needs*. New York: Harper.

<sup>3</sup>. UNICEF (2019). *Global Framework on Transferable Skills*. New York: United Nations Children's Fund.

<sup>4</sup>. <https://lifeskillsadvocate.com/blog/daily-living-skills-at-every-age-what-to-look-for/>

<sup>5</sup>. <https://media.focusonthefamily.com/fotf/pdf/magazine/checklist-4-lifeskills.pdf>

<sup>6</sup>. <https://ofthehearth.com/comprehensive-list-of-life-skills-for-ages-2-18/>

<sup>7</sup>. <https://tinyurl.com/y6rxvvr>

<sup>8</sup>. Zélanti, P., & Droit-Volet, S. (2011). Cognitive abilities explaining age-related changes in time perception of short and long durations. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 109(2), 143-157.