

# ENABLING ADOLESCENTS TO BUILD LIFE SKILLS

## *Part I* *Understanding concepts ...* *Evolving strategies*

*Mridula Seth*  
*Technical Adviser*  
*United Nations Population fund (UNFPA)*  
*New Delhi*

## **Enabling Adolescents to build Life skills**

*Understanding concepts...evolving strategies*

### *Abstract*

*In today's world of information technology, information is a pre-requisite for building thinking skills. However, knowledge alone does not ensure that the person loaded with information will be able to make rational decisions, solve problems, establish relationships with others and negotiate rationally and effectively. Improving access to services does not necessarily ensure utilisation of health services. Enhancing life skills of individuals can mobilise communities not only to create a demand and ensure effective use of these services, but also put pressure on the authorities to improve the quality of services.*

*Global increase in the incidence of AIDS, especially among the young people, has raised concern and the need for enhancing negotiation skills. Negotiation skills are an outcome of thinking and social skills. For better physical, social and mental health, young people require negotiation skills to resist peer pressure especially related to drugs, alcohol and sex and for effectively dealing with workplace problems. These skills even though developed in specific context, are applicable to other life situations. Helping individuals enhance their life skills for negotiating rationally and effectively is indeed a challenge for all those interested in helping young people see a better tomorrow.*

### Section 1: Conceptual framework:

- 1.1 Life skills
- 1.2 Thinking skills
- 1.3 Social skills
- 1.4 Negotiation skills

### Section 2: Enhancing life skills

- 2.1 Conditions for skills development
- 2.2 Operationalising life skills
- 2.3 Enhancing Thinking skills
- 2.4 Enhancing Social skills

## Part 1: Conceptual framework

### 1.1 Life Skills

Life Skills have been defined by WHO (1993) as “the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”. Life skills, from this perspective, are essentially those abilities that help to promote mental well being and competency in young people as they face the realities of life. Another term being used is “Living skills” referring to the personal competencies which enable the person to deal effectively with the demands and challenges which may confront them in everyday life (Yarham, 1999).

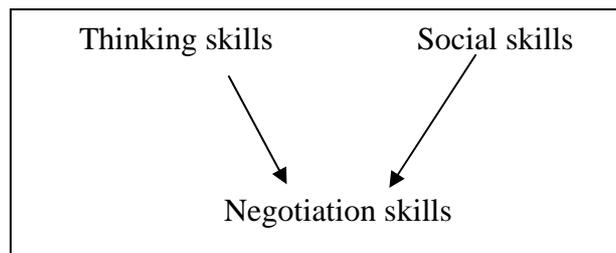
Core set of life skills areas identified by WHO (1994) for promotion of health and well being of children and adolescents are:

- \* problem solving
- \* critical thinking
- \* communication skills
- \* self-awareness
- \* coping with stress
- \* decision making (including goal setting)
- \* creative thinking (including value clarification)
- \* interpersonal relationship skills (including assertiveness)
- \* empathy
- \* coping with emotions

Life skills include a wide range of knowledge and skill interactions believed to be essential for adult independent living. The three major skill areas that need to be addressed are daily living, personal/social, and occupational skills. Goodship (1990) has listed these skills. Daily living skills have been listed as (a) managing personal finances, (b) selecting and managing a household, (c) caring for personal needs, (d) safety awareness, (e) raising, preparing and consuming food, (f) buying and caring for clothing, (g) exhibiting responsible citizenship, (h) using recreational facilities and engaging in leisure activities, (i) getting around the community. Personal and social skills are critical in maintaining friendships and keeping a job. These include (a) achieving self-awareness, (b) acquiring self confidence, (c) achieving socially responsible behaviour, (d) maintaining good interpersonal skills, (e) achieving independence, (f) achieving problem solving skills, (g) communicating with others. Occupational skills include (a) knowing and exploring occupational options, (b) selecting and planning occupational choices, (c) exhibiting appropriate work habits and behaviour, (d) seeking, securing, and maintaining employment, (e) exhibiting sufficient physical and manual skills, (f) obtaining specific occupational skills.

Effective acquisition of life skills can influence the way we feel about others and ourselves and will in equal measure influence the way others perceive us. These skills can enhance our productivity, self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-confidence. Life skills can give us the tools and techniques to improve interpersonal relations (Tinnari, 1998).

*In this paper, Life skills have been discussed in terms of thinking and social skills that enable an individual to negotiate rationally and effectively. Negotiation skills are an outcome of thinking and social skills.*



## 1.2 Thinking skills

The ability to engage in careful, reflective thought has been viewed in various ways: as a fundamental characteristic of an educated person, as a requirement for responsible citizenship in a democratic society, and more recently, as an employability skill for an increasingly wide range of jobs (Cotton, 1997). Perhaps most importantly in today's information age, thinking skills are viewed as crucial for educated persons to cope with a rapidly changing world. Many educators believe that specific knowledge will not be as important to tomorrow's workers and citizens as the ability to learn and make sense of new information.

Most researchers now accept the definition of thinking as a search for meaning, involving the mental processes that make sense out of experience. In fact, learning is thinking. That is, learning depends on prior knowledge and the specific mental strategies that evoke understanding in the learner. Thinking skills have been categorised as problem solving in the disciplines; general problem solving; reading and study strategies, self monitoring, components of intelligence and informal logic and critical thinking (Resnick, 1987). Thinking skills are the set of basic and advanced skills and sub skills that govern a person's mental processes. These skills consist of knowledge, dispositions and cognitive and metacognitive operations. Metacognition is the process of planning, assessing, and monitoring one's own thinking and is the pinnacle of mental functioning. Popular instructional model developed by the prominent educator Benjamin Bloom categorizes thinking skills from the concrete to the abstract – knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation. The last three are considered higher order skills. In fact, teaching children to become effective thinkers is increasingly being recognised as an immediate goal of education. If young people are to function successfully in a highly technical society, then they must be equipped with lifelong learning and thinking skills necessary to acquire and process information in a rapidly changing world. Thinking skills are necessary tools for making good choices when there are many alternatives of actions, and numerous individual and collective choices and decisions.

Although developing the ability to think has long been the stated goal of schooling, educators did not begin to attend seriously to the teaching of thinking until the 1980s. The Rockefeller Commission on the Humanities recommended that critical thinking be included in the U.S. Office of Education definition of basic skills. Three universities now offer a Master of Arts programme in teaching critical thinking. The California State University system requires a course in critical thinking; and the College Board has made it one of the six basic skills needed for college (ERIC 1988). "Constructivism" is a new theory of learning that is presently receiving much attention as an alternative view of knowledge. Constructivism, in Resnick's account, acknowledges three principles of learning: (a) learning is a process of knowledge construction, not of absorbing and recording pieces of separate information, (b) learning depends on previous knowledge as the principal means of constructing new knowledge and (c) learning is closely related to the situation or context in which it takes place. Social communities have been reported to play a key role in developing thinking abilities (Knapp 1992).

Critical thinking skills figure prominently among the goals for education, whether one asks developers of curricula, educational researchers, parents, or employers. Although there are some quite diverse definitions of critical thinking, nearly all emphasise the ability and tendency to gather, evaluate, and use information effectively. What is critical thinking? Critical thinking is the process of determining the authenticity, accuracy, or value of something; characterized by the ability to seek reasons and alternatives, perceive the total situation, and change one's views based on evidence. It is also called "logical" thinking and "analytical" thinking. Having a critical spirit is as important as thinking critically. The critical spirit requires one to think critically about all

aspects of life, to think critically about one's own thinking, and to act on the basis of what one has considered when using critical skills (Norris, 1985). Educational researchers and programme developers (Costa, 1985; Keating, 1988) have tended to include four elements in reports and writings on critical thinking. These include (1) content knowledge (knowledge of the discipline), (2) procedural knowledge (knowledge of thinking skills), (3) ability to monitor, use and control thinking skills (metacognition), and (4) an attitude to use thinking skills and knowledge. Winocut's listing of skills (Costa, 1985) includes three categories: (1) enabling skills, (2) processes, and (3) operations. Enabling skills include observing, comparing/contrasting, grouping/labeling, categorizing/classifying, ordering, patterning, and prioritizing. Processes include skills related to analyzing questions, facts/opinion, relevancy of information, and reliability on information. Processes also include skills necessary for inferring, understanding meanings, cause/effect, making predictions, analyzing assumptions, and identifying points of view. Operations include logical reasoning, creative thinking, and problem solving skills.

Critical thinking ability is not widespread. Data indicate that critical thinking skills are not learned well unless schools emphasize critical thinking and the use of critical thinking skills on a continued basis (Howe, Warren 1989). Whether critical thinking is a generalized and a transferable skill, or whether it is bound up in the particulars of a specific content domain is still an issue to be resolved (Keating, 1988). While there is evidence for domain-specificity, there is also evidence that mastery in some topic areas may lead to a subsequent ability to think critically in related areas. However, the necessity of integrating different sources of knowledge is being recognised in most current research paradigms. Analysis of items from tests using Bloom's Taxonomy have produced conclusions that students are generally not able to effectively use thinking skills without appropriate knowledge (Howe, Warren 1989).

The ability to think creatively, make decisions, solve problems, visualise, reason, analyze, interpret, and know how to learn – these skills are most often mentioned in definitions of critical thinking. Characteristics of critical thinkers are perseverance, flexibility, metacognition, transfer of knowledge, problem orientation, open mindedness, use of quality standards, and independence. These skills are desirable to the future work force and are not only critical to work, but are also needed to deal with the increasingly complex spheres of family, community and society (Kerka 1992). Creative thinking is a novel way of seeing or doing things that is characteristic of four components – fluency (generating new ideas), flexibility (shifting perspective easily), originality (conceiving of something new), and elaboration (building on other ideas).

### ***Issues related to thinking skills***

Thinking skills research reveals that creative and critical thinking abilities are teachable and learnable. Review of research on thinking skills by Cotton (1997) confirms that training teachers to teach thinking skill leads to student achievement gains. However, methodologies for teaching vary and there is no best way to teaching thinking skills. There seem to be controversies in thinking skills instruction. Is it better to teach thinking skills to students via infused programmes (integrating thinking skills instruction into the regular curriculum) or separate curricula? Is it better to teach these skills directly or to create situations whereby students learn them inferentially through being placed in circumstances that call for them to apply these skills? How much classroom time is required in order for thinking skills instructions to be effective? Is successful thinking-skills instruction partly a matter of establishing a certain classroom climate, one that is open and conducive to “thinking for oneself”? Theorists, programme managers, and classroom teachers have expressed different opinions.

- *Infused versus separate programmes* – while some studies support infusion of thinking-skills activities into subjects in the regular curriculum, others provide support for separate thinking-skills instruction. Support exists for both approaches indicating that either approach can be effective. Studies by Bransford (1986) report that approaches involving teaching from a metacognitive or problem-solving perspective enhances skills transfer in reading comprehension, mathematics, and writing, thus producing gains in student achievement supporting the view that blind instruction does not usually lead to transfer to new tasks. There seems to be an agreement among academicians promoting thinking skills that these should be integrated across the curriculum rather than taught in isolation. When the instruction focuses on helping students become problem solvers who learn to recognise and monitor their approaches to particular tasks, transfer is more likely to occur. In the context of reproductive health, the content in school curriculum is integrated into various subjects making the task of incorporating messages easier but assessment of impact of interventions difficult.
- *Direct versus inferential learning* – successful approaches have involved guiding students through the process of figuring out what strategies to apply and where those strategies can lead them. In one experiment with at-risk students in the HOTS (Higher Order Thinking Skills) programme the process is described as “control floundering”- “floundering” because students must feel their way (along a line of reasoning), but “controlled” because teachers stay with them assisting them to work through the steps of their tasks. Others favour direct instruction in the steps of whatever thinking process the teacher wants the students to learn. Teachers using this approach typically demonstrate the process using events and ideas that are familiar to the students and then applying the same generic process to unfamiliar material, usually new content from the school curriculum. Proponents claim that many students, particularly those whose out-of-school lives have offered little exposure to higher- order thinking, cannot be expected to develop these skills inferentially and must be taught them directly. It appears that either of the two approaches can be effective, and a blend of the two may well be most effective. There seems to be justification for placing more emphasis on direct explicit teaching, interactive discussions, substantive feedback, and control and self-monitoring strategies (Pearson, 1982).
- *Time requirement* – the topic is not so much the subject of controversy as of uncertainty. Experts seem uncertain as to how much time should be devoted to thinking skills activities in order for students to learn these skills well. Time requirement will vary for different students. However, research does show that those commercially or locally developed programmes that have made substantial differences in students’ academic performance are quite time intensive. Instrumental Enrichment requires three to five hours of instruction per week over approximately two years (Cotton, 1997). For these time demands, conducting meaningful thinking skills instruction requires a high level of staff commitment and administrative support.
- *Climate* – In the thinking skills literature, there is a strong emphasis on the importance of climate. Teachers and programmers need to systematically evaluate the general culture within and outside the classrooms and how this culture affects their ability to promote critical reasoning habits. It is even more important in case of non-formal education and with heterogeneous groups. A conducive climate needs to be fostered for the development of thinking skills. Twelve practices related to teacher behaviour have been recommended: setting ground rules well in advance; providing well planned activities; showing respect for each student; providing non threatening activities; being flexible; accepting individual differences; exhibiting a positive attitude; modeling thinking skills; acknowledging every response; allowing students to be active participants; creating experiences that will ensure success at least part of the time for each student; and using a wide variety of teaching modalities (Cotton, 1997).

*Why is Population education an important focus for critical thinking and an effective mechanism to enhance critical thinking?*

Critical thinking is important for making informed choices in all life situations. In reproductive health, fertility of women is influenced by life skills that can be enhanced even without formal education. Population and development problems are being recognized in the media, by all levels of government, and individuals concerned with the quality of life of people. Developing workable solutions to population problems requires choices and decisions based on a critical examination of information and opinions. Population education provides a good mechanism for developing critical skills by: (a) providing topics and problems that cut across the school curriculum and can enhance the integration of knowledge; (b) providing real problems that can be studied or simulated; and (c) by providing topics and problems that can be adjusted to the development levels of students.

### **1.3 Social skills**

Social skills are very important for personal development. Children who are unable to form close or satisfying relationships with peers should be of concern to parents and teachers alike. For one thing, these children miss out on opportunities to learn social skills that will be important throughout their lives. Especially critical are the skills to initiate and maintain social relationships and to resolve social conflicts, including communication, compromise, and tact. Children who lack ongoing peer involvement also may miss opportunities to build a sense of social self-confidence. Children without satisfying friendships may suffer from painful feelings of isolation. They may ultimately become truant or drop out altogether. Or, in their search for a sense of group belonging, the children may become vulnerable to the influence of delinquent or drug-abusing peers. Children require help from adults if they are to overcome serious relationship problems. These include social skills training, intervention for related problems, non-threatening experiences and cooperative classroom projects. Large groups can be threatening for children who lack self-confidence. Several strategies have been suggested to help children maintain a healthy outlook on their own social lives (Burton 1986). These include showing respect for the children's unique social needs (some children may be contended with few friends), creating social options for children without creating pressures. It is important not to communicate the expectation that children should be liked by "all of the people all of the time".

A survey of managers, supervisors, and employers of entry-level personnel in U.S. found the following work-related social skills and habits most important in entry-level employees (Hulsart & Bauman, 1983):

- Communication skills: giving clear oral instructions and explanations of activities and ideas; reporting accurately on what others have said; staying on the topic in job-related conversations; using appropriate vocabulary and grammar; and following the intent of oral directions and instructions.
- Interpersonal skills: functioning cooperatively with individual co-workers and as a team member; adhering to company policies and regulations; honesty, health, and safety standards; cooperating with the business' customers; being open to new ideas and methods; seeking clarification of instructions when necessary; exercising patience and tolerance; accepting constructive criticism and supervision; exhibiting leadership; and understanding supervisory authority and worker responsibility.

Employers focus on personal traits and social skills, termed "the invisible curriculum". When schools tolerate absenteeism, truancy, tardiness, sloppy work and misbehaviour, they are not helping students establish necessary work habits (Carol, 1988).

Communication apprehension (CA) has been defined as “an individual level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (McCroskey, 1977). Communication anxiety can be situational and may exist in most everyday communication situations. A widely accepted explanation for CA is the Negative Cognitive Appraisal Model (Glaser, 1981). The model assumes that the quiet child was criticized for his or her early language performance. As a result, the child learned to expect negative reactions and subsequently learned to avoid them by keeping quiet. The consequences of CA are emotional, educational and social. In the classroom, often the CA students’ lack of response or participation has a negative, spiraling affect – they are perceived as less capable, and are thus called on less frequently in class discussion. Their lack of enthusiasm tends to limit teachers’ attention to them, which further reinforces their own self-evaluation. The school environment can play an important role in creating a warm, easygoing climate, helping students get to know one another at the beginning of the year, using drama and role playing situations, having students speak to the class in groups or panels rather than individually, allowing students to work with classmates with whom they feel most comfortable, having students speak from their seats rather than the front of the room, presenting students with activities with oral activities in a developmental sequence (Friedman, 1980).

### ***Social skills and critical thinking***

A clear link between critical thinking, social interaction and deep learning has emerged. Deep learning requires a critical understanding of material. Active learner participation and ‘affective involvement’ that is supported by interaction promote deep learning. This is in line with other work that supports the idea of individual learning as a social phenomenon. Psychologists believe that cognitive skills are developed in a social context. Development of a ‘community of enquiry’ is essential for higher level critical thinking skills within the individual. Horizontal (student-student) and vertical (student-teacher) interaction is important. Group learning provides opportunity for enhancing social skills by encouraging social interaction and has been used to promote deep learning (Newman, Web and Cochrane).

Critical thinking is not just one-off assessment of a statement for its correctness, but a dynamic activity, in which critical perspectives on a problem develop through both individual analysis and social interaction. It is in the shared world that true meaning is achieved. While constructing meaning is a personal responsibility, the process of critical thinking also includes the application of meaning structures to the specifics of the context. The truth of concepts is determined through collaborative action which necessitates sharing control of the process. Critical thinking can be considered as a process of problem solving. The stages include i) problem identification - elementary clarification; ii) problem definition – in-depth clarification; iii) problem exploration – inference; iv) problem evaluation/application – judgement; v) problem integration – strategy formation.

### **1.4 Negotiation skills**

The term ‘negotiation’ is commonly used in the business circles. Negotiation skills in the corporate world relate mainly to profits and trade-offs assuming that the negotiator is dealing with an opponent who has to be won tactfully. Negotiation involves clinching a deal for maximizing profits. Understanding the other party’s strengths and weaknesses, work environment and future prospects help the negotiator to arrive at a satisfactory deal which in the long run contributes to promoting the interests of the organisation. Negotiation courses taught in management schools are becoming very popular where young, achievement oriented executives acquire training to enhance their negotiation skills. They demand and get a high price for these skills.

In real life situations, when dealing with family members and friends, negotiation skills are needed to reach common decisions. Emotional bonds make negotiation difficult raising several ethical concerns. When negotiation in the business world occurs between people of different status (trade unions, business partners), both parties are well informed and clear of the purpose. However, within the family and social environment, several constraints related to power structure and hierarchy operate making it difficult to negotiate in the real sense. Negotiation is a process by which people exchange things of value using civilized means (Covey,2000) ‘Negotiating rationally’ means knowing how to reach the best agreement, not just any agreement. It does not always mean as “getting to yes”. How you structure problems, process information, frame the situation and evaluate alternatives will influence effectiveness as a negotiator (Bazerman, 1992).

Negotiating skills is an outcome of Thinking and Social skills. Thinking skills include self and social awareness, decision-making, problem solving, and goal setting. Social skills include establishing relationships, listening and communicating effectively. Negotiation skills, is a result of rational thinking based on informed choices and effective communication to get one’s ideas/plans accepted by the other person. Thus, to negotiate rationally and effectively, one needs to enhance thinking and social skills. It is a process of self-realization and development but is facilitated by others who are mature and thinking individuals. Adolescents and young people need to negotiate with others for a healthy and happy life style and to overcome the strong influence of peer pressure for experimenting with drugs, alcohol and sex. There is no issue or conflict between parents and teenagers that cannot be resolved. The process of negotiation should be such that both sides should feel that they have gained, however small the gain may be (Veeraraghavan, 1999).

### ***Who do we negotiate with?***

*Negotiating with self and others* - literature related to negotiation skills refers to negotiation as an activity with another person. The need for negotiation with self is not understood. In our experience of the life skills training in the Shiksha Karmi project (UNFPA, 2000), we realised that negotiating with self is a pre-requisite for negotiating with others. What do we understand by negotiating with self? It means making decisions regarding the people/activities to get involved with, the extent of involvement and when and how to detach or wean off. Attachment or involvement is necessary for quality, and detachment is essential for sustainability. Being involved yet aloof or detached requires reflection, vision and spirituality. Living in the present, not brooding of the past requires negotiating with self.

Members of families have many opportunities or needs to reach common decisions. Good negotiation processes require taking other people seriously, treating them with respect. One has to listen and try to understand their interests, their fundamental concerns. How do we negotiate in a family? If we view negotiation as a collection of strategies for taking unfair advantage of others, then it is wrong to use it in a family situation—or in business or any other part of life. According to Covey (2000), negotiation is a process by which people exchange things of value using civilized means. The real question in family decision-making is not whether to negotiate but rather whether the negotiation process used by the members of the family is fair. If one negotiates with a family member using unfair tactics, that will harm the relationship. An unfair approach also means that at least one party is going to walk away from the negotiation feeling less committed to fulfilling his or her obligations. Thus, whether we are thinking about negotiating within a family, in business, or in other parts of life, the fairness of the process determines whether a party is behaving properly or not. It is important to negotiate fairly to achieve the long-term results you want. For negotiations related to sexual activities to be fair, both sides have not only to be considerate but assertive and communicative of their needs and desires.

## ***Factors influencing negotiations***

Young people are often confronted with situations when they have to negotiate with others individually or in a group at home, in place of work or socially among peer group. Following are some of the factors that influence negotiation skills:

*Availability of information-* Good negotiation and decision making requires that you identify and use truly reliable, not just available information. Information that is easily recalled because it is vivid may be interpreted as being reliable when it is not. Unfortunately, it is hard to defuse the impact of availability. You have to distinguish what's emotionally familiar to you from what's reliable and relevant. When people evaluate information and options, they often pay attention to certain facts but ignore others. Things or events you've encountered more often are usually easy to remember - they are more "available" in your memory. In negotiation, people who present information in colourful or emotionally vivid ways exert a much greater impact on decisions than individuals with equally informative, but dull, presentations. While there are many potential anchors on which to base strategy in a negotiation, relative availability is the primary reason some anchors are considered and others ignored.

*Bias in perceptions* - People often behave in ways inconsistent with their own self-interest. One common mistake is to irrationally stay committed to an initial course of action. When you commit yourself to a course of action, this commitment biases your perception and judgement, and causes you to make irrational decisions. You must recognize this bias and search vigilantly for disconfirming information, as well as the confirming data you intuitively seek. People not only perceive information, but they also selectively provide information to others. People don't want to admit failure. They like to appear consistent, and the consistent course of action is to increase commitment to previous actions.

*Goals as anchors in negotiation* - the initial stand people take when entering a negotiation act as anchors and affect each other's perception of what outcomes are possible. If an initial offer is too extreme, you need to re-anchor the process. Just as initial offers can affect your perception of what is possible, goals affect what you think is attainable or even acceptable. Goal setting only helps if the goals are set appropriately. Goals themselves can also become anchors, which can either hamper or enhance how you negotiate. If you prepare before a negotiation and are flexible during the negotiation, you can reduce the adverse impact of anchoring.

*Overconfidence and negotiator behaviour* - many people do badly in decision making and negotiation because of overconfidence. People distort their perceptions of situations to make themselves feel more competent and secure. These distortions result in "need-based illusions" which result in irrational behaviour. Need-based illusions are motivational. They influence decision making and negotiation. There are three need based illusions: illusion of superiority, illusion of optimism, and illusion of control. These need-based illusions lead people to see the world not as it is, but as they would like it to be.

*Emotion and rationality* - how do emotions affect perceptions of what is fair in a negotiation and influence decision making and subsequent behaviour? A positive mood can increase the need-based illusion of superiority. Studies have shown that those who were in a 'good mood' were able to reach more creative and integrative agreements (Carnevale, 1992).

## Part 2: Enhancing life skills

Life skills are operationalised in specific situations. Opportunities have to be provided for developing these skills. The process is as important as the content. Following are the expected outcomes of life-skills interventions:

- Enhanced self esteem
- Self confidence
- Assertiveness
- Social sensitivity
- Listening and communication skills
- Ability to establish relationships
- Ability to plan and set goals
- Learning to learn
- Acquisition of knowledge related to specific contents

The basic institutions laying the foundation of these skills are the family and school. Acquisition of life skills can influence the way we feel about ourselves, the way others perceive us. Productivity, self-esteem, self-confidence interpersonal relationships are also affected. Improvement in Life skills can result in individuals making informed choices to serve the interests of self and others, becoming “proactive” and change agents. They are able to resolve conflicts, cope with stress and develop negotiating skills for personal and social interests.

### 2.1 Conditions for skill development

- *External conditions* for skill development are related to the environment; skill instruction; and information (Lions Quest. 1988). The environment must provide opportunities, be warm and caring, predictable, consistent and safe. Skill instructions refer to the enhancement of thinking and social skills. Adolescents need information in order to practice skills and make wise, healthy decisions
- *Internal conditions* of adolescents that influence their behaviour are: self-perception; motivation; and cognition. Self-perception is the perception of oneself as capable, worthy and in control of situations. Motivations of young people are influenced by the needs, interests and relevance of activities planned for and by them. Cognition is an important factor for information gathering and critical thinking. Memory, understanding and reasoning determine not only individual perspective, but also contribute towards development of social understanding and “pro-social” behaviour.

The Discussion document on the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCERT, 2000) has recognised the importance of linking education with life skills: “it is through these skills that pupils can fight the challenges of drug violence, teenage pregnancy, AIDS and many other health related problems. In the Indian context, UNESCO study on Life skills (UNESCO, 2000) in non-formal education has identified self-awareness as the first necessary life skill especially for the disadvantaged and the disabled who need a self-image. The twin of self-awareness is empathy. Awareness of self should be counterbalanced by awareness of others, their different feelings, desires. Other skills identified are: critical thinking and creative thinking; decision making and problem solving; coping with emotions and stress; effective communication and interpersonal relations skills.

## 2.2 Operationalising life skills

Based on review of literature, life skills have been categorised as thinking, social and negotiation skills.

### a) *Thinking skills*

Thinking skills include- a) self-awareness; b) social awareness; c) goal setting; and d) problem solving and decision-making. Information is important for making informed choices, therefore, any intervention programme for adolescents should be based on providing information and education which is relevant, timely, comprehensible and given in a manner that is interesting to them. When faced with day to day problems, adolescents need to face challenges boldly. The skills to think critically can be developed by providing opportunities and making them realise the consequences of hasty, unplanned decisions. Involving them in situations demanding critical thinking can enable them to develop their thinking skills.

### b) *Social skills*

Social skills include: a) building positive relationships with friends and family; b) listening and communicating effectively; c) taking responsibility; and d) coping with stress. Social skills enable adolescents to be accepted in society and to accept social norms that provide the foundation for adult social behaviour.

### c) *Negotiating skills*

Negotiation skills are the outcome of thinking and social skills. We need the skills to negotiate with self and others. Negotiating with self is a pre-requisite for negotiating with others.

Three approaches can be used for operationalising life skills: content, thematic, and activity approach.

- a) *Content approach* – focus is on information to be imparted for increasing knowledge related to select subject areas. Contents may be decided on the basis of need assessment of specific groups, organizational priorities, or mandate of funding agencies. For example, vocational skill building or problems related to adolescence may be the need of the group (need based), health or income generation may be the organizational priority, or HIV/AIDS, gender may be the mandate of the funding agency.
- b) *Thematic approach* – themes that are appropriate and relevant to the target group are selected. Information and experiences related to the theme are built into the sessions. One theme with sub-themes or several themes may be selected. Example, understanding self, being a woman etc. Within the theme of understanding self, sub themes like understanding our bodies, understanding our environment may be selected.
- c) *Activity approach* – in this approach, focus is on selected activities that have scope for providing experiential learning for building life skills. Example, role-play, debate, quiz and other activities through which thinking, social and negotiation skills can be enhanced. In the activity approach, there is need to be cautious that the participants do not turn the activities into entertainment losing sight of the hidden educational agenda. The trainer must have clarity about the expected outcomes of the activity and provide clear instructions to the participants before initiating the activity.

## 2.3 Enhancing thinking skills

Cognitive thinking is not the same as and should not be confused with, intelligence; it is a skill that may be improved in everyone. However, it is not something that necessarily develops with maturity and so should be taught to all ages. There is some controversy whether or not critical thinking should be taught as an independent course or within established courses. Learning

cognitive skills separately may not necessarily facilitate their application to content-area studies or real-life situations. Research suggests the effectiveness of such courses depend on parallel efforts across the curriculum, including training all teachers in cognitive skills (Resnick 1987).

Three types of cognitive theories have been identified upon which teaching strategies can be based. Information processing theory explains how the mind takes in information. Knowledge structure theories depict how knowledge is represented and organised in the mind. Social history theory explains the vital role of cultural context in the development of individual thinking. Together, these three perspectives offer a comprehensive view of cognition. In this view, learning is characterised as an active process in which the learner constructs knowledge as a result of interaction with the physical and social environment. Learning is moving from basic skills and pure facts to linking information with prior knowledge; from relying on a single authority to recognizing multiple sources of knowledge; from novice-like to expert-like problem solving (Kerka 1992).

Cognitive research demonstrates that learning is not automatically transferred to new settings; context is critical to understanding; passive learning does not develop cognitive management skills and higher order learning is not a change in behaviour but the construction of meaning from experience.

- ❑ Help learners organise their knowledge – external memory aids such as concept maps ease the information overload
- ❑ Build on what they already know
- ❑ Facilitate information processing – teachers/facilitators can model problem solving, demonstrating their thought processes, strategy selection, and response to mistakes
- ❑ Facilitate Deep thinking through elaboration – cooperative learning techniques such as peer tutoring or paired problem solving make learners observe and modify their own thinking processes
- ❑ Make thinking processes explicit – in reciprocal teaching, the teacher models desired metacognitive processes by reading a paragraph, asking questions, summarising, and predicting what would happen next in the text. Learners gradually take on the teacher’s role.

Classroom environments that support higher order thinking have the following characteristics:

- ❑ Reflections of real-life situations and contexts
- ❑ Collaboration among teachers, disciplines, students
- ❑ Encouragement of curiosity, exploration, and investigation
- ❑ Responsibility for learning vested in the learner
- ❑ Failure viewed as a learning opportunity
- ❑ Acknowledgement of effort, not just performance

The role of teacher and facilitators in developing thinking skills differs from traditional instruction in being a guide and friend to facilitate learning. The following behaviours promote cognitive development:

- ❑ Requiring justification for ideas and probing for reasoning strategies
- ❑ Confronting learners with alternatives and thought-provoking questions
- ❑ Asking open-ended questions
- ❑ Requiring learners to be accountable for class discussion
- ❑ Serving as a master of apprentices rather than a teacher of students in vocational education
- ❑ Using Socratic discussion techniques

Outdoor inquiry has been identified as a method to help students develop the skills and dispositions of thinking. These include: meeting experts on the job, thinking aloud together; forming concepts from experience, examining natural and cultural objects, using outdoor social groups and generating interesting questions (Knapp, 1992).

Three specific strategies have been suggested for teaching critical thinking (Bonnie, 1994): building categories, finding problems, and enhancing the environment. The building categories strategy is an inductive reasoning tool that helps students categorize information by discovering the rules rather than merely memorizing them. The Finding Problems strategy is a way of framing tasks using skills similar to those needed for the ill-defined problems they encounter in life. Tasks developed with this strategy are sufficiently defined as to be solvable, but do not state explicitly which variable or aspect of the problem will constitute or enable a solution. The physical and intellectual environment that encourages a spirit of discovery facilitates critical thinking. If the seating is arranged so that learners share the “stage” with the teacher/facilitator and all can see and interact with each other, the passive, receptive mode many learners adopt is minimised. Visual aids can encourage ongoing attention to critical thought processes.

A number of researchers claim that the classroom must nurture an environment providing modeling, rehearsal, and coaching for students and teachers alike. “Wait time” or the time a teacher allows for a student to respond as well as the time an instructor waits after a student replies has been found to have an impact on students’ thinking. Teachers who consciously managed the duration of pauses after their questioning and provided regular intervals of silence during explanations created an environment where thinking was expected and practiced. Teachers need to become more tolerant of “conflict”, or confrontation in the classroom. They need to raise issues that create dissonance and refrain from expressing their own bias, letting the learners’ debate and resolve the problems. To really engage in critical thinking, they must encounter the dissonance of conflicting ideas. Dissonance, as discussed by Festinger, 1957 promotes a psychological discomfort that occurs in the presence of an inconsistency and motivates the students to resolve the issue. Training young people to do critical thinking is not an easy task. Teaching that involves higher level cognitive processes, comprehension, inference, and decision making often proves problematic for students. Such instruction is often associated with delays in the progress of a lesson, with low success and completion rates, and even with direct negotiations by students to alter the demands of work (Carrol, 1989).

At each educational level, thinking must be practiced in each content field. This means hard work for the teachers/facilitators. It is much easier to teach learners to memorize facts and then assess them with multiple-choice tests. In a course that emphasise thinking, objectives must include application and analysis, divergent thinking, and opportunities to organise ideas and support value judgements. When more teachers realise that the facts they teach today will be replaced by the discoveries of tomorrow, the content-versus-process controversy may be resolved. Critical reading, writing to learn and classification games have been suggested for enhancing critical thinking (Carr, 1990). Critical reading or thinking while reading should be central to any discussion on thinking skills, because the reading of textbooks plays such a prominent role in the content fields. Teaching of thinking through writing has been presented as a two-step writing process called the first-order and second-order thinking. For first-order thinking, free writing – an unplanned, free association type of heuristic writing designed has been recommended to help students discover what they think about a topic. The free-writing technique produces conceptual insights and produces intuitive creative thinking. The reflective scrutiny of second-order thinking is a necessary follow up of free-writing. In this stage, the writer examines inferences and prejudices and strives for logic and control. Classification plays a significant role in the development of logical thinking and abstract concepts from early childhood to adulthood. All

classification tasks require the identification of attributes and sorting into categories according to some rule. While the sorting of concrete objects is an appropriate activity for the young child, verbal analogies are appropriate for any age. Integration of classification activities into content areas is crucial to their value. Schema theory holds that information, if it is to be retained, must be categorized with something already stored in memory. Brainstorming techniques that aid comprehension are recommended to help learners access their prior knowledge about a topic to be read, and thus classify and retain the new information.

## **2.4 Enhancing Social skills**

Social skills must be learned. We are not born instinctively knowing how to interact effectively with others. Studies have suggested that people with poor social skills have low self-esteem and may look for acceptance in other ways such as becoming “the best” at things that are illegal or joining a “gang” for approval and a sense of belonging. Adolescents need to be taught the social skills required for high quality cooperation and productive work. Conditions for enhancing social skills to achieve mutual goals include getting to know and trust each other, communicating accurately and unambiguously, accepting and supporting each other and resolving conflicts constructively.

If we want young people to learn appropriate social skills, we must structure the learning environment so that these skills can be addressed and practiced. We need to increase the opportunity for adolescents to interact within and outside the school environment so that prosocial skills can be learned. Prosocial behaviour includes such things as taking turns, working with partners, increasing positive relationships, demonstrating positive verbal and non verbal relationships, showing interest and caring, settling conflicts without fighting (ERIC, 1993). Social skill deficits or problems can be viewed as errors in learning, therefore, appropriate skills need to be taught directly and actively. Social skill lessons are best implemented in groups of 3 to 5 students and should optimally include socially competent peers to serve as models. The first social skill group lesson should focus on three things: an explanation of why the group is meeting, a definition of what social skills are, and an explanation of what is expected of each person in the group. Students with behavioural disorders may be particularly uninvolved in their learning due to problems with self-concept, lack of a feeling of belonging to the school, and repeated failures in the school. Instructional strategies involving self-control, self-reinforcement, self-monitoring, self-management, problem solving, cognitive behaviour modification, and metacognitive skills focus primarily on teaching students the skills necessary for taking responsibility and showing initiative in making decisions regarding their own instruction (ERIC, 1993).

Cooperative learning is an effective method of enhancing social skills. In cooperative learning groups, students must learn both academic subject matter (taskwork) and the interpersonal and small group skills required to function as part of a group (teamwork). Cooperative learning is inherently more complex than competitive or individualistic learning because students have to simultaneously engage in taskwork and teamwork (Johnson 1996). The greater the members’ teamwork skills, the higher will be the quality and quantity of their learning. Every cooperative lesson is a lesson in social skills as well as academics. Teamwork skills are developed through this process. However, it is important to understand What and How of teamwork skills. For teaching teamwork skills, the teacher/organiser should be specific, start small, and make learners repeat the skills till they are integrated into their behaviour repertoires and they start doing it habitually and automatically.

Johnson (1996) has identified four levels of cooperative skills:

- ❑ Forming – skills needed to establish a cooperative group
- ❑ Functioning – skills needed to manage the activities and completing the tasks effectively encouraging everyone to participate
- ❑ Formulating – skills needed to build deeper level understanding of materials being studied to stimulate the use of higher quality reasoning strategies
- ❑ Fermenting – skills needed to stimulate reconceptualisation of the material being studied, cognitive conflict, the search for more information, and the communication of the rationale behind one’s conclusions. Examples are criticizing ideas (not people) and not changing your mind unless you are logically persuaded (majority rule does not promote learning).

Engaging in interpersonal action requires the contact opportunity with other people for the act to occur, a reason sufficient to motivate the act, and access to a method or procedure whereby the act can occur (Johnson, 1996). For students to work as a team, they need (a) an opportunity to work together cooperatively (where teamwork skills can be manifested), (b) motivation to engage in the teamwork skills (a reason to believe that such actions will be beneficial to them), and (c) some proficiency in using teamwork skills.

- Ensure that adolescents see the need for the teamwork skill. To establish the need, you may ask them to suggest the teamwork skills they need to work together more effectively. From the suggested skills, choose one or more to emphasise. Setting up a role-play that provides a counter example where the skill is missing is a fun way to illustrate the need for the skill.
- Adolescents should understand what the skill is, how to engage in the skill and when to use the skill. The skill may be operationally defined into actual verbal and nonverbal behaviours so that they know specifically what to do. One way to explain a social skill is through a T-Chart. (Gatz and Meehan, 2000). The teacher/facilitator lists the skill (e.g., encouraging participation) and then asks the group. “What would this skill look like (nonverbal behaviour)?” After several ideas are generated the group is asked “What would this skill sound like (phrases)?” Students list several ideas. These are displayed for their reference and clarity on what the skill sounds and looks like.
- Practice situations should be set up to encourage mastery of the skill.
- Ensure that each learner (a) receives feedback on his or her use of the skill and (b) reflects on how to engage in the skill more effectively next time.
- Ensure perseverance in practicing the skill until the skill seems a natural action. Most skill development goes through several stages from being self conscious, awkward engaging in the skill to automatic routine use where they have fully integrated the skill into their behaviour.

Engaged learning for promoting social skills has been used by some educators. Engaged learning puts the learner in the driver’s seat and requires the teacher to shift roles. It is a shift from traditional definition of learning to a form in which the students are focussed on a challenge in real-life task.

## 2.5 Life skills in HIV/AIDS

The following life skills were identified at the EFA 2000 Regional conference at Bangkok for dealing with situations related to HIV/AIDS:

- How to make sound decisions about relationships and sexual interactions and stand up for those decisions (*Thinking skills*)
- How to deal with pressures for unwanted sex or drugs (*Thinking skills*)
- How to recognize a situation that might turn risky or violent (*Thinking skills*)

- How and where to ask for help and support (social skills)
- When ready for sexual relationship, how to negotiate protected sex or other forms of safer sex (*negotiation skills*)
- How to show compassion and solidarity towards people with HIV/AIDS (*social skills*)
- How to care for people with AIDS in the family and community (*social skills*)

## REFERENCES

1. Bazerman, M.H. and Neale, M.A. *Negotiating Rationally*. The Free press. New York. 1992
2. Bonnie, Potts. "Strategies for teaching Critical thinking" ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation Washington, 1994.  
([http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/ed358606.html](http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed358606.html))
3. Bransford, J.D.; Burns, M.S.; Delclos, V.R.; and Vye, N.J. "Teaching Thinking : Evaluating Evaluations and Broadening the Data Base." *Educational Leadership* 44/2 1986:68-70
4. Burton, Christine B. "Children's Peer Relationships" ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education Urbana IL. 1986.  
([http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/ed265936.html](http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed265936.html))
5. Carnevale, P.J. and Isen, A.M. The influence of positive affect and visual access on the discovery of integrative solutions in bilateral negotiations, *Organisational Behavior and Human Decision processes* 37 (1996), In Bazerman, M.H. and Neale, M.A. *Negotiating Rationally*. The Free press. New York. 1992
6. Carol, Asher. "High school graduates in entry level jobs: what do employers want?" 1988  
([http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/ed293972.html](http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed293972.html))
7. Carr, Kathryn .S "How to teach Critical thinking". ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, Urbana IL. 1990.  
([http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/ed326304.html](http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed326304.html))
8. Carrol, T, M. "Critical thinking: promoting it in the classroom". ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills Bloomington IN,1989  
([http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/ed306554.html](http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed306554.html))
9. Costa, A. (ed). *Developing Minds: A Resource Book for Teaching Thinking*. Association for Curriculum and Supervision, Arlington, VA, 1985. ED 262 968
10. Cotton, K. "Teaching Thinking Skills". *School improvement Research Series* 1997  
(<http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/6/cu11.html>)
11. ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education Reston VA "Behavioral Disorders: Focus on Change" 1993 ([http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/ed358674.html](http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed358674.html))
12. ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education Washington "Critical thinking skills and Teacher Education" 1988 ([http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/ed297003.html](http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed297003.html))
13. Friedman, P.G. "Shyness and reticence in Students". Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1980. ED 181 520 In [http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/ed284315.html](http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed284315.html)
14. Gatz, S. Meehan, S. "Investigating Engaged learning and best use of technology". July 2000 updated ([http://www-ed.final.gov/lincon/el\\_invest.shtm](http://www-ed.final.gov/lincon/el_invest.shtm))
15. Glaser, S.R. "Oral Communication Apprehensions and Avoidance: The Current Status of Treatment Reseaarch". *Communication education* 30 (1981): 321-41
16. Goodship, Joan M. "Life skills mastery for students with Special needs". ERIC Digest # E469 1990 ([http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/ed321502.html](http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed321502.html))
17. Howe, Robert W. Warren, Charles R. "Teaching Critical thinking through Environmental education". ERIC/ SMEAC Environmental Education Digest No.2. 1989.  
([http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/ed324193.html](http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed324193.html))
18. Hulsart, R., & Bauman, P. Colorado employability skills survey report of results. Denver, CO: Colorado State Department of Education. ED 240 380, 1983.
19. Johnson D.W. and Johnson, R.T. "Block scheduling and Cooperative learning" *The Cooperative Link*. The newsletter of the Cooperative Learning Institute. Vol 11 Issue 1, 1996  
(<http://www.cooplearn.org/pages/newsletter1996.html>)
20. Keating, Daniel. "Adolescent' ability to engage in critical thinking". *National Centre for Effective Secondary Schools*, Madison, WI, ED 307 508, 1988
21. Kerka, Sandra. "Higher order thinking skills in vocational education". *Eric Digest* No. 127, 1992

22. Knapp, E. Clifford. "Thinking in Outdoor inquiry" ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural education and small schools 1992 ([http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/ed348198.html](http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed348198.html))
23. Lions Clubs International & Quest International, Lions Quest in India Foundation Manual "Skills for Adolescence". Mumbai, 1988
24. McCroskey, J.C. "Oral Communication Apprehension: A summary of Recent Theory and Research" Human Communication Research 4, 1977: 78-96. ([http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/ed297003.html](http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed297003.html))
25. NCERT. National Curriculum Framework:discussion document, 2000
26. Newman, Web and Cochrane. (<http://www.qub.ac.uk/mgt/papers/methods/contpap.thml>)
27. Norris, S.P. "Synthesis of Research on Critical Thinking". Educational Leadership 42/8 (1985):40-45
28. Pearson, P.D. A context for instructional research on Reading comprehension. In Cotton, K. "Teaching Thinking Skills". School improvement Research Series 1997 (<http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/6/cu11.html>)
29. Resnick, L. 1987. "Education and learning to think" Washington D.C: National Academy Press as quoted in ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education Washington "Critical thinking skills and Teacher Education" 1988 ([http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/ed297003.html](http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed297003.html))
30. Steven Covey, 2000 (<http://www.negotiationskills.com/qaprocess9.html>).
31. Sturmski, Neil "Learning disabilities and the Correction system" (<http://www.nifl.gov/nalld/VOL3NO2.HTML>)
32. Tinnari. Report of the National Workshop organised by SCOPE, UNFPA and NCERT on Gender sensitive life skills approach. New Delhi. 1998
33. UNESCO. Life skills in Non-formal education. Project report 2000
34. UNFPA Report "Building Life skills for better health – the Rajasthan experience", Delhi 2000
35. Veeraraghavan, Teenage blues, Mosaic Books, New Delhi, 1999
36. WHO Technical Report Series 838: Increasing the relevance of Education for Health professionals, 1993.
37. WHO. The development and dissemination of life skills education: an overview. MNH/PSF/WHO Geneva 1994
38. Yarham, C. Kak, A. et.al. Schools Total Health Program: Health Education and Living skills. Health Education & Promotion International.

# ENABLING ADOLESCENTS TO BUILD LIFE SKILLS

## *Part II* *Needs Assessment* *Conceptual Framework*

*Mridula Seth*  
*Technical Adviser*  
*United Nations Population fund (UNFPA)*  
*New Delhi*

## **Enabling Adolescents to build Life skills**

### ***Needs Assessment: Conceptual framework***

*Reproductive health of the adolescents depends on their skills that determine the extent to which even the information available to them will be utilised and negotiated in their life including sexual behaviour. In the traditional socio-cultural milieu, it is difficult to organise activities exclusively focussing on RH even if desired by the adolescents. Activities incorporating RH and gender issues along with other inputs will be culturally acceptable. Adolescents have diverse needs. This framework provides broad guidelines for assessing the needs of adolescents with a focus on reproductive health. Use of participatory methods builds the capacity of the stakeholders and the process is empowering*

Part 1: Concepts & terminology

Part 2: Purpose and aspects of Needs assessment

Part 3: Assumptions in planning programmes for adolescents

Part 4: Information needed and Programme implications

Part 5: Methodology of Needs assessment

Need is a gap between what is existing and what is desired or ought to be. Assessing the needs of adolescents is important for planning meaningful, relevant interventions. Providing information and creating services does not necessarily ensure that adolescents will fully utilise them. Information is a pre-requisite for building thinking skills and making informed choices. However, for negotiating with self and others, besides thinking skills, enhancing social and communication skills are important. Several organisations are currently engaged in activities for adolescents. Needs assessment involving adolescents themselves as stakeholders with youth friendly adults can yield valuable data for organising activities.

### **PART 1: CONCEPTS & TERMINOLOGY**

1.1 Adolescence - stages of development

1.2 Life Skills approach

1.3 Reproductive health

1.4 Gender

#### ***1.1 Adolescence - stages of development and characteristics***

Adolescence is a period between sexual maturity and the assumption of adult roles. Earlier sexual maturity, later marriage and the emphasis on education have contributed to the acceptance of adolescence as a distinct phase of life.

##### *Pre Adolescence (ages 9-11)*

- Most of the time spent with family
- Learning to master skills
- Values, beliefs and religion determined by family
- Same gender associations, learn gender roles internalising stereotype gender roles
- Girls focus on relationships (expressive roles) and nurturing, boys on achievement and competition (instrumental roles)
- Not yet aware of self as a sexual being

### *Early Adolescence (ages 11-13)*

- Withdrawal from family
- Impulsive, moody, behaviour driven by feelings
- Spontaneity, spirit of adventure
- Self esteem defined by others
- Pre-occupation with physical appearance
- Concerned with acceptance by peers, uses peer group to evaluate self
- Movement away from family towards peers
- Some interaction with opposite sex

### *Middle Adolescence (ages 14-16)*

- Becomes isolated, seeks privacy
- Moves away from parents towards peers
- Strengthening of peer group bonds
- Peer influences appearance, initial sexual experience, extra curricular activities
- Starts to challenge rules, spirit of defiance
- Sexual interest begins, may initiate sex
- Attraction to opposite sex has a special meaning
- Begins exposure to others' values and beliefs
- Family influences religious values, education, career

### *Late Adolescence (ages 16-19)*

- Attempts to identify adult roles and responsibilities
- Better understanding of self- strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
- Greater understanding of consequences of behaviour
- Improved problem solving skills
- Inclined to make choices about career
- Conflict between traditional, new roles and values

## **1.2 Life skills approach**

Life skills are the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life (WHO, 1993). These include thinking, social and negotiating skills.

*Thinking skills* – cognitive development of adolescents makes them mature thinkers, explorers and doers. The word cognition refers to the inner process of the mind that leads to knowing. The mental activities that are included in this are problem solving, remembering, fantasising, creative thinking and goal setting. These are components of intelligence. Boys and girls have equal potential for intellectual development. However, due to socio-cultural factors, girls do not get equal opportunities to be engaged in tasks involving complex mental activities. Information, a pre-requisite for knowledge, is essential for exploring alternatives and making informed choices. Thinking skills involves introspection for becoming aware of self as an individual and social awareness for understanding social problems and taking a stand.

### *Social skills*

Social skills include: a) appreciating/validating others; b) building positive relationships with friends and family; c) listening and communicating effectively; d) taking responsibility; and e) coping with stress. Social skills enable adolescents to be accepted in society and to accept social norms that provide the foundation for adult social behaviour.

### *Negotiating skills*

Negotiation skills are the outcome of thinking and social skills. We need the skills to negotiate with self and others. Negotiating with self is a pre-requisite for negotiating with others. For effectively negotiating with others, adolescents need to learn to be assertive including learning to say “no” to drug use and other harmful behaviour. Assertiveness without aggressiveness is a skill that is of immense value in negotiating various aspects of personal and social interests.

### *How do Life skills affect the adolescents?*

- The ability for abstraction enables adolescents to become objective, rational and critical. They start questioning their parents, teachers and adults who often do not encourage them to ask questions and challenge their authority. This leads to conflict, delinquent behaviour and protests.
- Adolescents start believing that others are interested in them. This leads to an imaginary audience and they become very self-conscious.
- Adolescents believe that what is common to everyone is unique to them, a notion referred to as “personal fable”. An adolescent believes that changes he/she is going through are unique, sometimes even causing concern and anxiety. However, as they grow and mature, they become reality-oriented.
- Creativity is different from intelligence. It describes a person’s capacity for unique and original work. Many adolescents who are creative lose their creativity because of lack of encouragement and appreciation. Pressure from adults to conform to social norms diminishes the creative urge in adolescents
- Inability to communicate effectively lowers their self-esteem and confidence resulting in withdrawing themselves and reluctance to seek help when needed
- Poor self image and lack of courage to say ‘no’ results in poor negotiation skills leading to indulgence in harmful behaviour and practices.

### **1.3 Reproductive health**

RH is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being (not merely the absence of disease or infirmity) in all matters related to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes. RH is a lifetime concern for both women and men, from infancy to old age. In many cultures, discrimination against girls and women begins in infancy and determines their life course. Sexual health encompasses behaviours essential to countering sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS. Sexual health aims at the enhancement of life and personal relations or social skills. Issues of education and appropriate health care arise in childhood and adolescence. These continue to be issues in the reproductive years, along with family planning, STDs and reproductive tract infections, adequate nutrition and care in pregnancy, and the social status of women. Male attitudes towards gender and sexual relations arise in boyhood, when they are often set for life. Men need early socialisation in concepts of sexual responsibility and ongoing education and support for healthy sexual and family formation behaviour. Experiences during adolescence are critical for lifetime impact.

### **1.4 Gender**

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles and responsibilities assigned to women and men according to the situation they live in. According to most cultural norms, girls should not be sexually active before marriage, but the fact is that, many are. The increase in school attendance intensifies contact between boys and girls, even where single-sex schools are the norm. These trends, together with the declining average age at menarche, mean that increasing numbers of girls are exposed to opportunity for sexual activity before marriage. Without access to sexuality education and contraceptive information and services, many girls become pregnant.

## **PART 2: NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

### **2.1 Types of needs**

- Felt/manifest needs – recognised by themselves and others. The term “needs” usually refers to felt needs.
- Unfelt/latent needs – not recognised. It is sometimes argued whether something not perceived as ‘needed’ can it justified as a ‘need’. Converting unfelt needs into felt-needs is a challenge for those working with the adolescents. For example, postponing age of marriage, being economically independent, assertive may not be perceived as needs

### **2.2 Purpose of Needs assessment**

- a) Programme planning: planning interventions based on the needs of the adolescents  
*Interventions for:*
  - Improving access to services –health, education, vocational, counselling
  - Provision of information to utilise existing services and generate demand for quality services
  - Enhancing Life Skills to meet the challenges of life
- b) Advocacy: obtaining support from policy makers, programmers and educational administrators on issues related to adolescents
- c) To influence the reluctance to acknowledge sex before marriage, and to facilitate more open discussion about adolescent RH and action that could desensitise these issues

### **2.3 Objectives of Needs Assessment:**

1. To understand the background and profile of the adolescent groups in a community
2. To gain information regarding access, utilisation and preference of services available for adolescents
3. To find out the kind of support available to the adolescents from adults at home, school, place of work and in the community
4. To assess the antecedents of risk taking behaviour

### **2.4 Aspects of Needs assessment**

**Background and profile** of the adolescent groups in a community:

- Profile (age; sex ratio; marital status; educational status; family economic status, nutritional status; knowledge related to RH, work force participation)
- Media reach: information-seeking pattern
- Life skills a) Thinking skills – self awareness, social awareness, decision making; problem solving, goal setting; b) Social skills – interpersonal relationships; accepting responsibilities; communicating effectively; coping with stress; c) Negotiation skills – saying no to self and others

**Access & utilisation of services** available for adolescents:

- Education (formal/non-formal)
- Health & counselling
- Vocational
- Recreational (games, cinema, library etc)
- Sibling care (creches)

### **Socio-cultural milieu & Support available**

- Environment in which adolescents live and work- values; societal norms; family structure; role models; youth groups/organisations
- Influence of adults in decision making at home, school, place of work and in the community - parents; teachers; opinion lead

### **Antecedents of risk taking behaviour**

- Sexual behaviour
- Ways in which adolescent sexual partnerships are formed
- Social meanings attributed to relationships
- Early childbearing

## **PART 3: ASSUMPTIONS IN PLANNING PROGRAMMES**

- Programmes that address only one aspect of adolescent decision-making tend to be less effective at influencing behaviour
- Creating a supportive environment is important
- Increasing adolescents' knowledge (thinking skills), interpersonal relationships and communication skills (social skills) are important for building negotiation skills
- Adolescents are influenced by peers but they also listen to key adults and have role models
- Involving adolescents in all stages of programme is important
- Adolescents and adults important to them know very little about sexual health and development and believe all kinds of myths.

## **PART 4: INFORMATION NEEDED AND PROGRAMME IMPLICATIONS**

Information generated through Needs assessment of adolescents enables programmers to plan strategies and activities best suited to meet their felt and unmet needs. The process of collecting information through participatory techniques can be empowering and involve key players as stakeholders ensuring their participation in implementing the activities. In planning Needs assessment, the following key components and information needed may be considered having programme implications:

### **Objective 1.1 Understanding adolescents -profile**

<i>Components</i>	<i>Programme implications</i>	<i>Info needed</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Composition of adolescents in the community</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Need and scope for organising separate programmes for adolescents</li></ul>	Age, sex, marital status, education, occupation, special needs,
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Knowledge related to RH</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Designing of core curriculum</li></ul>	Understanding level of awareness of anatomy & physiology, process of growing up, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Family economic status</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Need for financial incentives and support for sustaining motivation of the adolescents/families</li></ul>	Families below poverty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Nutritional status</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Need for nutrition education</li></ul>	Health status; dietary practices, myths /misconceptions related to foods/practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Work force participation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Involvement of employers, NGOs for work site enrichment programmes</li></ul>	proportion of participation (Boys/girls); type of work

**Objective 1.2 Understanding adolescents – information seeking behaviour**

<i>Components</i>	<i>Programme implications</i>	<i>Info needed</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Information seeking pattern</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use of acceptable channels of communication</li> </ul>	Access and use of print/ mass media (preferences); informal channels of communication (friends, quacks, other sources)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Role of media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Incorporation of gender sensitive messages</li> </ul>	Stereotype roles reinforced by media; pornographic literature available and read

**Objective 1.3 Understanding adolescents – Life skills: Thinking skills**

<i>Components</i>	<i>Programme implications</i>	<i>Info needed</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Self awareness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Need for enhancing self-esteem/confidence; developing leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Qualities perceived (Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT);</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Social awareness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gender sensitisation, AIDS awareness, human rights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Understanding social problems; sexual harassment/abuse</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Problem solving /decision making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Relevant information for making decisions/informed choices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Whether adolescents are making decisions in day-to-day life</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Goal setting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Promoting choices for being in control of mind &amp; body</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Aspirations; whether conscious of short term/long term goals</li> </ul>

**Objective 1.4 Understanding adolescents – Life skills: Social skills**

<i>Components</i>	<i>Programme implications</i>	<i>Info needed</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interpersonal relationships, social meanings to relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Promoting group/team work; using peer group approach; strategy of forming groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Existence/ scope of youth clubs; type of activities, composition</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Accepting responsibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sustainability of efforts, effective monitoring,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identifying leaders</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Enhancing communication skills to access &amp; demand services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Verbal/ non verbal skills</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Coping with stress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mental health problems/prevention of suicide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mental health problems incidence of suicides</li> </ul>

**Objective 1.5 Understanding adolescents – Life skills: Negotiating skills**

<i>Components</i>	<i>Programme implications</i>	<i>Info needed</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Saying ‘no’ to peer pressure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Negotiation and conflict resolution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Peer influence in smoking, drinking, drugs, sexual behaviour</li> </ul>

### Objective 2.1 Access and utilisation of services available for adolescents

<i>Component</i>	<i>Programme implications</i>	<i>Info needed</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access and quality of formal and non-formal education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthening of alternative system of education; establishing linkages between formal and non formal education;</li> </ul>	Literacy data; School enrolment & dropout rate; quality of schooling
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health &amp; counselling services available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing awareness among adolescents; promoting inter-sectoral linkages</li> </ul>	Type of services, pattern of utilisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recreational opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tapping folk media, games, cinema, libraries etc for disseminating messages</li> </ul>	Facilities existing /used
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sibling care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing day care services to free adolescents to pursue activities</li> </ul>	Number of adols (girls) unable to join formal/NFE education due to sibling care
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy/ legislation affecting adolescents eg., age at marriage, dowry, MTP, reservation for girls/SC/STs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legal literacy to create awareness among the adolescents</li> </ul>	Awareness of legal rights
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information channels and use of media for education of adolescents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effective use of media for and by the adolescents</li> </ul>	Availability and use of channels

### 3.1 Socio-cultural milieu of the adolescents

<i>Components</i>	<i>Programme implications</i>	<i>Info needed</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Values providing moral and ethical framework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activities to bring about social change considering existing values</li> </ul>	Values related to personal hygiene esp menstrual hygiene, gender roles, age at marriage, pre marital sex, abortions, infertility, sex education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Societal norms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocacy important for radical change in societal norms</li> </ul>	Openness in discussing personal issues,
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Role models</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Involvement of adult role models (leaders, film stars, sport persons, social workers, professionals) for promoting activities</li> </ul>	Persons perceived as role models , qualities perceived in them
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activating/strengthening youth groups</li> </ul>	Existence/ potential of youth groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parental relationships and comfort level related to communication of sensitive messages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sensitisation &amp; education of parents</li> </ul>	Family structure (joint/nuclear),
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attitudes, competencies &amp; communication skills of teachers/ workers especially for transacting sensitive issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capacity building of teachers/workers; Training content and methodology for communication of sensitive issues</li> </ul>	Incorporation of PopEd in school curriculum; co-curricular activities, training of teachers ; info on quality of transacting messages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attitude and influence of opinion leaders and policy makers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sensitisation of opinion leaders/ policy makers</li> </ul>	Persons identified as Formal & Opinion leaders

### 3.2 Support of Adults

<i>Components</i>	<i>Programme implications</i>	<i>Info needed</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Within the family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Involvement of parents, siblings</li> </ul>	Opportunities for decision making; acceptance of decisions made by the family, discipline-rewards & punishment, violence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support within the education system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Flexibility of approaches; organisation of activities</li> </ul>	Attitude of persons in authority towards adolescents and their concerns; development of leadership,
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support at place of work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Providing space for incorporating activities not directly related to work outputs but for improving quality of life</li> <li>▪ Inter-sectoral linkages</li> </ul>	Work culture, opportunity/ scope for inclusion of activities  Health facilities/education

### 4.1 Antecedents of risk taking behaviour

<i>Components</i>	<i>Programme implications</i>	<i>Info needed</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ RH problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provision of information/ services</li> </ul>	Problems and treatment sought/ preferred, Constraints
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Practices related to sexual behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Counselling &amp; services to meet the needs of adolescents</li> </ul>	Sexual experience (homo/heterosexual), use of contraceptives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ways in which adolescent sexual partnerships are formed,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Strategies for interventions</li> </ul>	Influence of peer groups

## PART 5: METHODOLOGY OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Quantitative and qualitative methods used judiciously can provide data for planning interventions. Incorporate both qualitative and quantitative methods. Baseline survey combined with participatory methods will yield insights that can be most useful for assessing the needs of adolescents in a community. Persons from the grassroots comprising of selected adolescents and workers can be trained to use participatory methodologies.

### 5.1 Adolescents as partners in Needs assessment

- The overall development of adolescents requires interventions by youth friendly adults who have faith in the adolescents' capability to shape their own future. Involvement of adolescents themselves in the entire process ensures that their needs are met and skills developed for future participation in governance at different levels.
- Adolescents need to learn to accept responsibilities by making and keeping commitments, acting with integrity and honesty. They have to develop a positive attitude towards life and view challenges as opportunities. Adults need to appreciate and understand that adolescents are curious, courageous, risk taking and friendly. Building their trust should be the foundation of a healthy relationship with them.

## 5.2 Differences between survey methods and participatory activities

Participatory methods yield rapid and more information that can provide the basis for planning interventions. Participatory activities are a learning process for the communities and institutions. Open discussions in focus groups provide credible and relevant information. The process adds ownership to findings and commitment to action.

<i>Technical and social survey</i>	<i>Participatory activities</i>
Evaluators <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• analyse information</li><li>• make generalisations</li><li>• recommend action</li></ul>	Stakeholders <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• analyse information</li><li>• internalise information</li><li>• apply lessons</li></ul>

## 5.3 Guidelines for conducting the Assessments

*Selecting and training the Assessment team* – the team should consist of members from the community including responsible adolescents, professionals and field level functionaries. The training helps the team to assimilate the methodology and its application. The data collection and analysis is a learner-centred, participatory process. The aim is not to extract information but to generate discussions to facilitate community analysis and action planning. Elements of the training include

- Conceptual understanding of the framework
- Objectives of the assessment
- Facilitation process
- Review of indicators, means of verification, coding and data entry
- Emphasis that the team will include disaggregated data on gender
- Team involvement in development and adaptation of assessment materials
- Hands-on experience with participatory tools & pre-testing
- Outline for report writing agreed upon

## 5.4 Participatory Methods

### *Self survey*

Helps to know opinions of a large number of people. It should be simple, have only a few questions. Each question should be simple straight forward, short & clear. It should seem like an easy conversation. The information obtained can be analysed by aggregating the responses.

### *Group discussion*

A small number (8-25), come together to share experiences & decide on action through group discussion. Popular, easy method has the advantage of combining data collection, analysis and action planning. Contradictory opinions & points of view of different persons can be openly discussed & analysed. Facilitates a deeper analysis of the problem. These enable exploring different perspectives, allow introduction of ideas & indigenous measures that can be identified. Important means for generating knowledge and information flows among the people, conscientize through a process of rapport building and collective reflection.

### *Social Mapping*

After group discussions, prepare village maps focussing on any characteristic. Helps visualise socio-economic situation as well provides basis for doing causal analysis of problems by comparing different groups. Enables identification of target group/ people at risk.

### *Camp*

A camp, a workshop or a 'shibir' can be used as an intensive event to carry out participatory data collection. Provides an opportunity for reflections by the participants away from their daily pressures & facilitates development of a feeling of solidarity among them

### *Research team*

Sometimes the problem may involve some technical aspects, then members may join with outside experts in studying the problems & finding solutions.

### *Fact finding visit*

Useful for a group interested in solving a problem, to visit another area where a similar problem has been solved. The tour can become an investigative visit to find out how other similar adolescents went about solving a similar problem. Continuous reflection both during & after the visit must be encouraged.

### *Audio visual production/ popular theatre*

The group members identify a problem and either enact a play or use a simple audio-visual method to present the problem. These can be used to facilitate analysis & reflection.

### *Documents*

Analysis of existing documents like reports, diaries, registers etc., may also contain useful information.

### ***Conclusion***

Life Skills Education contributes to the personal development of adolescents and improves their physical, social and mental health. Needs assessment is a technique for planning programmes that are meaningful and relevant to the group/s for whom the activities are organised. Understanding the needs, environment and resources available can go a long way in building partnerships and ensuring sustainability of efforts.