

Teaching Life Skills at the Library

Programs and Activities on Money Management,
Career Development, and More

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Contents

Preface | vii

Acknowledgments | xiii

Introduction: You've Got This! | xv

PART I PLANNING LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMS

- | | | |
|----------|--|----|
| 1 | Let's Start Planning | 3 |
| 2 | Partnership Opportunities and Program Promotions | 11 |
| 3 | Evaluate and Sustain Your Life Skills Programs | 17 |

PART II LIFE SKILLS ACTIVITY PLANS

- | | | |
|-----------|---|----|
| 4 | Jobs | 23 |
| 5 | Money | 31 |
| 6 | Cooking | 39 |
| 7 | Self-Care | 47 |
| 8 | Personal Care | 55 |
| 9 | Home Skills | 63 |
| 10 | Communication | 71 |
| 11 | Relationships with Friends and Family | 79 |
| 12 | Stress Management | 87 |

Conclusion: Taking Care of Business | 95

Appendixes

Appendix A: Planning Template for a Life Skills Program | 97

Appendix B: Reading Tie-Ins | 101

Index | 111

Preface

It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.

—E. E. CUMMINGS

MY BACKGROUND IN TEACHING LIFE SKILLS HAS BEEN A JOURNEY THROUGH working in both school and public libraries, raising my own kids, and my own personal transformation. I first became interested in teaching life skills in 2014. I had been a teen librarian for many years, and I was embarking on a new journey and had just become a new library manager. I was managing two libraries in a community that was socioeconomically disadvantaged. This community wasn't just affected by a lower income status, but by lower educational opportunities, and the community members also suffered from a lower quality of life in specific neighborhoods.

Shortly after I started managing, I was contacted by a local high-school teacher who told me that she had a group of seniors who were going to be graduating soon. She told me that they could benefit from some life skills classes before they graduated. She asked me if I could come up with a variety of topics and teach life skills classes for her students. This sounded like a great opportunity for me to create a partnership with this teacher and the school, so I took on this challenge with high hopes. I did have some reservations, though. I wondered if I could pull it off. I am a grown-up, of course, but I'm not an expert on how to be one. Seriously, my favorite colors are pink and purple, I love unicorns, and throwing glitter is my superpower. In all seriousness though, it was really enlightening to brainstorm about the topics that I could teach these students.

The one question I had going through my mind was: how am I going to come up with life skills topics and teach students so that they want to learn these topics? I thought about my background and how I had graduated with a

master's degree in consciousness studies and holistic health long before I was a librarian. Completing this degree was an incredible experience for me, and I really wanted to bring what I had learned through consciousness studies into my life skills classes because my studies had been drawn from psychology, philosophy, sociology, art, and holistic practices like guided therapy and dream studies. I've been asked many times what the heck consciousness studies is. In essence, the focus is on the transformative experiences, practices, and beliefs of many cultural, spiritual, and psychotherapeutic traditions. Through this graduate program I was taken on a journey of self-discovery and transformation. The program is designed not only to galvanize your wisdom, courage, love, joy, and vitality, but also to enrich your sense of meaning, passion, and purpose. It was then that I realized that I've been through a lot in my life; and with the knowledge I had from my consciousness studies degree, I was sure that I could come up with a list of the most important topics and create some really amazing life skills classes and programs. It's true that life skills are important, and most of the time these skills are learned through life experiences, so I knew I was ready to start on a new journey of teaching and sharing my wisdom.

During the research and planning process, I also realized that anyone at any age could benefit from a life skills program. Most life skills programs are geared to help individuals so that they can effectively manage the daily obstacles in life. At that same time, it just so happened that my son was turning eighteen, and he gave me a lot of ideas on topics. He told me that he was disappointed that he hadn't learned any basic life skills in school. He mentioned that he was interested in learning how to apply to colleges, find a job, and acquire cooking skills. With all of the questions that he had, it felt like the perfect time for me to come up with a comprehensive list of important life skills topics and programs that would be ideal for any person to learn.

The life skills classes I designed went over well, and I ended up planning and presenting programs at the library for the next several years. I also passed a lot of the information on to my son. It was sort of interesting when several years later the term *adulthood* came into play, because it seems that many people were using this term as a way to mock the younger generation. This made me a little sad because it is my son's generation that is being targeted as not being ready for adulthood, but I knew from his responses that he wasn't learning any life skills in school that he needed to know in order to properly become an adult.

This rings true for many people who are struggling to learn how to take care of themselves; and it's true that there is usually a point in each of our lives when we will need to become more independent and start to take better care of ourselves. But . . . what if we are unequipped to handle the curveballs that life throws at us? This can easily happen to any one of us and if it does, there are some crucial things that we will need to learn before we can take steps to living on our own.

What are these steps and how do we get there? It's all about learning life skills. If you've heard of the term life skills, then you know that these are the skills that everyone needs to know in order to become independent. The great thing is that a program at the library that focuses on different life skills can be useful for any age group and can be very meaningful for those who need a little guidance in this area.

I've also heard many people say that they just don't want to "be an adult" anymore, as if they actually have a choice to be an adult . . . or not. Many people don't like the term *adulthood* because it suggests a negative outlook on individuals who don't really want to grow up or who detest doing adult things. This connects to the term life skills because these are the skills and accomplishments that we all have to learn in order to sustain ourselves, and we can really look at this as a positive thing that we can all do for ourselves.

What I have learned after teaching life skills programs for the past several years is that many people are looking for ways to learn how to successfully take care of themselves, but they just don't know where to go to get the help. If we look back over the last one hundred years, we can see that people grew up and took on the role of becoming an adult in a very different way than today. Today, many people don't know how to seek out responsibilities as an accomplishment, and this could become a pitfall for the younger generation now. We really don't want anyone avoiding their responsibilities, and many are doing this by staying within the comforts they know—instead of stepping into unknown territory and learning the life skills needed to evolve into maturity, which is actually a rite of passage that involves growth and transformation.

The way that people grow and develop is essential to how they are going to live their lives as grown-ups. If we look even deeper, we can discover why life skills are important and why we need them. Life skills are needed to transition through life's milestones, such as moving out on your own, going to college or

getting a job, getting in a serious relationship, or getting married, and sometimes even becoming a parent, if that path is chosen.

Some might say that reaching milestones doesn't really define a person's status as responsible, and that is a good point. Life skills are more about learning the ordinary, day-to-day responsibilities that you may have to take on, and this is done by imparting knowledge through education. Other abilities like independent thinking and self-reliance are also necessary for surviving on your own, but these usually come through one's own life experiences and personal growth over time.

There is no magical milestone marking when a person will become responsible. Some of the accomplishments that are supported by life skills might be going to college, supporting oneself financially, living with a roommate, becoming self-sufficient, and contributing to a household. Ultimately, life skills programs help prepare us to live on our own and to become responsible beings.

We all need opportunities to learn things for our own personal survival, but sometimes those opportunities don't always come up if we live in certain environments. This is an area where the library can step in and fulfill a component of lifelong learning, which can help us in both our coping skills and our personal development.

Many people might think that learning about life skills is boring, or wonder why anyone cares about that stuff, but these are very important tasks that bridge the gap between living as a dependent and venturing out on your own. It's like acknowledging the gap between expectation, achievement, and reality. No matter how boring we think it is, growing up is hard, and the challenge is to embrace all the resources that are out there in order to narrow that gap and make it a little easier to cross.

For some people, age is just a number, and it doesn't signify what the person should have achieved by a certain age or time frame. Most people will graduate from high school around the age of eighteen, and then their life skills will gradually develop over time with experience and opportunities. Upon graduation, it could take five years or in some cases even ten years to mature or reach optimum adult status. The idea of not putting a number on your age has become more common today because schools often don't teach the basic life skills that people need to thrive as they move through the defining stages of their lives.

One last thing I want to let you know is that I have included an appendix at the end of the book called “Reading Tie-Ins.” These are books that I highly recommend when you start to plan your own life skills programs at the library. I have carefully curated these titles and have used them myself in my life skills planning. They will be extremely helpful and will give you some great insights going forward. You don’t have to purchase all of these books; they are reading suggestions, and you may find them right inside your own library.

For Review Only

Introduction

You've Got This!

I had a wonderful childhood, which is tough because it's hard to adjust to a miserable adulthood.

—LARRY DAVID

LET'S FACE IT, ADULTHOOD IS HARD. BETWEEN MAKING FINANCIAL DECISIONS, maintaining a healthy work–life balance, and juggling health, family, friends, and other responsibilities, life can sometimes feel overwhelming. Place these same responsibilities on an individual just entering adulthood who has less real-life experience and it can feel even more overwhelming. So why not make sure our teens and young adults are more prepared to face the world before they go out on their own? How can we also reinforce these skills for adults who may never have learned them or who may need a refresher?

We can do this by teaching life skills at the library. In this book, we break down what it means to be an adult and the required life skills needed to maintain a healthy, stable lifestyle. So what exactly are life skills?

Life skills refer to the basic skills that a person needs to navigate through life, such as financial management, career development, cooking, and self-care. At the library we can provide programs and activities that help patrons expand these life skills and accomplish their goals.

The Importance of Teaching Life Skills at the Library

When we offer life skills programs at the library, we can encourage our participants to imagine and prepare for real-world situations, such as planning a healthy meal, shopping for that meal, and cooking the meal at home. By doing this type of practice, we can help participants see how these skills are relevant to their lives and how they can practice them.

When teaching life skills programs, know that issues with social skills can come up. Remember that program participants, especially high school students, are still discovering who they are, and this can make every interaction in their lives feel monumental. If anyone attending is nervous, remind them that the library promotes a safe space and a relaxed environment. Participants should hopefully feel that when they attend a life skills class at your library. You can help create a relaxed environment by sharing a story about yourself when you were younger or by describing a skill that you didn't learn in school or from your parents, but rather had to figure out on your own. By sharing a relatable experience, you let the group know that they are not alone and that everyone struggles with learning new skills.

For many of us social skills are a given, but for others, it may not come as easily. I remember I was painfully shy in high school. I couldn't get up in front of class and speak; I had a hard time being in large groups. It took me many years to overcome my shyness. Those days are long gone now since I became a mom and a librarian. I have stretched my social skills far beyond those school days. These programs can help with building strong communication skills, as many activities focus on teamwork and working in small groups, where good communication is key. A great way to help your library community build these types of skills is by offering programs focused on life skills. In this book, we'll provide ideas for easy-to-implement activities that will keep attendees engaged and teach important life skills—everything from communication to budgeting. With all this information in your pocket, you will be able to put together your own life skills program with ease. Let's get started!

Index

A

active listening, 71–72
audience, target age group for, 14

B

benchmarks, 18
budget planning, 33–37

C

careers. *See* jobs/careers
charades, personal care, 55–57
cleaning solutions, 66–68
communication
 listening skills, 71–72
 movies, teaching using, 74–75
 silence, 73–74
 teamwork, 76–77
 See also relationships
cooking
 grocery shopping, 39–41
 importance of as topic, 5
 meal planning, 41–42
 pizza, 43–46
 smoothies, 42–43
cooperation/collaboration, 85–86
couches, cleaning, 69–70
creative outlets, 49–50
criteria for evaluation, 18

D

dancing, 87–89
dental care, 57–58
dogs, 53–54

E

Easy Breezy Dusting Spray, 68
eco-friendly cleaners, 68
evaluation of program, 17–18

F

Facebook, 14–15
family. *See* communication; relationships

feelings, sharing, 79–81
financial literacy jeopardy, 34–35. *See also*
 money management
Fragrant Cleaner, 68
friends. *See* communication; relationships

G

goals, setting, 4
grocery shopping, 39–41

H

hands-on learning
 ideas for, 6
 value of, 6
handwritten notes, 28–30
home skills
 cleaning solutions, 66–68
 couches, cleaning, 69–70
 mirror cleaning, 60–61
 spring cleaning, 65–66
hosts, 4–5

I

interviews
 communication after, 28–30
 mock, 26–28
 preparing for, 25–26

J

jobs/careers
 application process, 23–24
 importance of as topic, 5
 interview prep skills, 25–26
 mock job interviews, 26–28
 search process, 25–26
 thank-you notes, 28–30

L

Lemony Lime Fruit Punch recipe, 89
life skills programs
 communication, 71–77
 conclusion regarding, 95–96

life skills programs (*cont'd*)
cooking, 39–46
evaluation of, 17–18
home skills, 63–70
importance of, xv–xvi
jobs/careers, 23–30
money management, 31–37
partnerships for, 11–13
personal care, 55–61
planning, 3–9
promotions for, 13–15
relationships, 79–86
self-care, 47–54
stress management, 87–94
sustaining, 18–19
template for, 7–9, 97–99
timing of, 18–19
listening skills, 71–72

M

marketing, 13–15
meal planning, 41–42
mindfulness, 90–91
mirror cleaning, 63–64
mock job interviews, 26–28
money management
financial literacy, 34–35
importance of as topic, 5
needs vs. wants, 33–34
teaching importance of, 23–24
travel, 35–37
movies, teaching communication using,
74–75

N

needs vs. wants, 33–34
nontoxic cleaner recipes, 68
nutrition. *See* cooking; meal planning

O

objectives, setting, 4
online job applications, 23–24
opening up/sharing, 79–81

P

packing a suitcase, 58–59
partnership opportunities, 11–12
personal care
charades for, 55–57
dental care, 57–58
packing a suitcase, 58–59
photo booth activity for, 60–61
pets, 53–54

photo booth activity for personal care,
60–61
pizza, learning to cook, 43–46
positive thinking, 91–92
practice interviews, 26–28
presenters, 4–5, 12–13
program design, overview of, 6
promotions, 13–15

R

Random Acts of Kindness (RAKs), 51–52
relationships
cooperation/collaboration, 85–86
opening up/sharing, 79–81
respect, 83–84
trust, 82–83
See also communication
respect, 83–84

S

self-care
creative outlets, 49–50
pets, 53–54
Random Acts of Kindness (RAKs),
51–52
teaching importance of, 47–49
silence, 73–74
smoothies, learning to make, 42–43
social media, 14–15
spring cleaning, 65–66
stress management
dancing, 87–89
mindfulness, 90–91
positive thinking, 91–92
time management, 92–94
suitcase, packing, 58–59
Super Cleaner, 68
sustaining program, 17–18

T

teamwork, 76–77
teeth/dental care, 57–58
thank-you notes, 28–30
time management, 92–94
topics, choosing, 5
traveling, 35–37, 58–59
trust, 82–83

W

wants, needs vs., 33–34

Z

Zesty Lemon Cleaner, 68