

LIFE SKILLS HELP STUDENTS PREPARE FOR THEIR FUTURE



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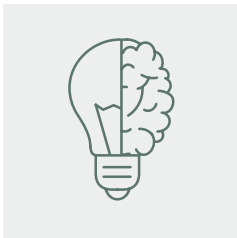


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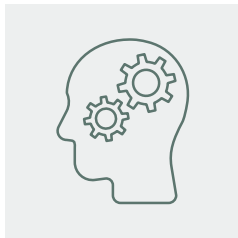


We all want Wyoming's children to have the opportunity to grow into caring, responsible, and successful citizens. Learning how to cooperate, empathize, persevere, and be respectful takes practice. And as kids practice, over time, they build a strong foundation for their future.

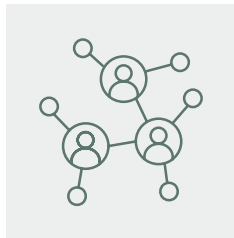
When young people acquire “the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions,”¹ they handle stress better, perform better in school, and more successfully transition into higher education and the work force. These life skills, often called social-emotional learning, represent five core competencies:²



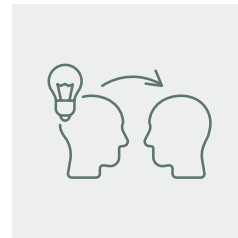
Self-awareness



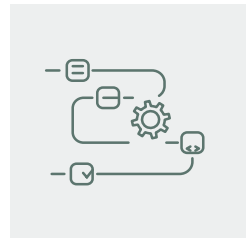
Self-management



Relationship skills



Social awareness



Responsible
decision-making

These skills help children learn and develop impulse control, problem solving, and the give and take of communication.³ Children also learn to recognize and manage their own emotions and to cope with mental and emotional challenges.⁴ Handling stress and emotions successfully is not just good for our Wyoming kids now, but it helps them as adults when they enter the working world.



PRACTICING LIFE SKILLS CAN HELP DEVELOP POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

When youth do not learn and use life skills, they may struggle mentally and emotionally, and experience depression or anxiety. In 2022, 66% of Wyoming middle and high school students acknowledged feeling depressed or hopeless “in the last 30 days.”⁵ Further, Wyoming’s teen suicide rate was the fourth worst in the United States in 2020.⁶ Between 2018 and 2020, 26 Wyoming teens, ages 15-19, died by suicide.⁷

In 2022, a review of research evaluating approximately one million preschool through high school students documented that students in schools with life skills programs showed consistent, positive improvements in their ability to manage stress and their attitudes about themselves and others.⁸ By enhancing young people’s coping skills and resiliency, these schools had fewer discipline problems and a better school climate.⁹ Their students engaged in less disruptive behavior; they saw less bullying and violence; and they had fewer incidences of alcohol, tobacco, or other drug use.¹⁰

Knowing where to learn about mental health and develop resiliency is also important. When Wyoming students from six school districts were asked where they learn about mental health, their top answers were parents and family, followed by teachers and school.^{11,12} When asked what they would do if they were feeling very sad, stressed, angry, out-of-control, or lonely, students’ top responses were talk with parents and family members, talk to their friends, or deal with it on our own.^{13,14}

This feedback came from students participating in Project AWARE during the 2021-2022 school year. The goal of Project AWARE is to increase access to mental health services in Wyoming communities by eliminating obstacles, such as financial constraints or lack of transportation. Another six districts will implement the program in the 2023-2024 school year.

PRACTICING LIFE SKILLS IMPROVES SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

The same 2022 review of the research showed that schools that taught life skills had students with higher grades, test scores, attendance, and rates of homework completion than schools that did not teach life skills.¹⁵ Additionally, social emotional learning improves attitudes towards school.¹⁶



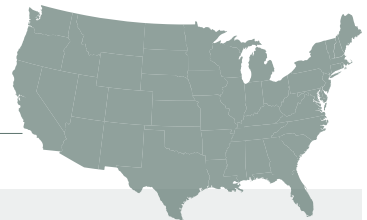
WYOMING PARENTS AND EDUCATORS SUPPORT TEACHING LIFE SKILLS TO STUDENTS

71% VIEW AS
A TOP 3
PRIORITY

71% of participants in the *Profile of a Graduate* survey put **teaching Life Skills** in schools as a “top three priority.”¹⁷



NATIONAL SUPPORT FOR LIFE SKILLS



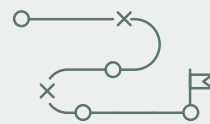
88%

of parents **want schools to teach social and emotional skills**¹⁸



90%

of educators **agree social and emotional learning improves students' academic achievement**¹⁹



74%

of high school students **say social and emotional learning would help them personally**²⁰



“ Children who develop life skills also tend to be happier, have fewer health problems, and engage in less criminal behavior as grown-ups.²¹

THE BENEFITS OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING EXTEND INTO ADULthood

Creating opportunities where young children can practice and grow the skills that help them regulate their emotions and show empathy for others can have long-term positive effects. For example, when children learn to control their impulses, then as adults they tend to experience more success in school and have higher incomes.²² Children who develop life skills also tend to be happier, have fewer health problems, and engage in less criminal behavior as grown-ups.²³

HOW CAN WE BEST SUPPORT OUR YOUTH?



TEACHERS²⁴

- ✓ Demonstrate healthy interpersonal relationships with other teachers and students
- ✓ Give students time to practice life skills, like reflection and collaboration by working, for instance, in groups to solve a math problem



SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS²⁵

- ✓ Implement carefully selected evidence-based programs
- ✓ Promote training and professional development to help educators gain the skills they need to teach life skills
- ✓ Implement measurement tools like the Youth Risk Behavior Survey to consistently collect data over time and monitor changes in depression and anxiety



STATE AND LOCAL POLICY MAKERS²⁶

- ✓ Establish state competencies/standards for life skills
- ✓ Encourage the identification and selection of high-quality evidence-based life skills programs, and allocate funding for their inclusion in schools



PARENTS

- ✓ Educate yourself about life skills
- ✓ Lead by example; show your children what managing emotions looks like
- ✓ Engage in your child's education

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- 26 Ibid.





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This publication is a project of the Wyoming Community Foundation's Counts Kids program with funding by the Annie E Casey Foundation. We thank them for their support but acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented here are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Casey Foundation.

This publication was designed and produced by Jessica Perry.