

Ideas for Teaching Life Skills

KEY: Activity appropriate for specified age group	Level 1: youth aged 8-10	Level 2: youth aged 11-14	Level 3: youth aged 15-18	Level 4: youth aged 19+
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The following activities are ideas to help you teach life skills to youth in your home. This is not a complete list – what else can you come up with?

MONEY MANAGEMENT		
Talk with youth about your views on money and about their views on money, understanding that culture plays a role in these perspectives.	When you buy something, have youth look at the receipt to see how much was added to the cost due to sales tax. When youth want to buy something, have them calculate the sales tax.	Try using the envelope system to learn budgeting: give the youth envelopes with cash for each category of spending (fun money, etc.) and when the money is gone, it's gone.
Ask youth to describe what seems important to different people based on how they spend their money, and then ask what their priorities are for their own money.	When youth are working, have them look at their pay stub to see how much was taken out of their wages for payroll taxes. Describe gross and net wages, FICA, etc.	When youth get their first job, let them spend their first paycheck how they want to. Talk with them about how long the money lasted and how they might do it differently next time.
Start young children with a piggy bank, and then open a savings account once the piggy bank is full. Look over the account statements with the youth so that they can see the interest they are earning on their money.	Talk with youth about paying taxes and where tax monies go. Have youth look at your tax forms as you fill them out to see what information they will need to fill out the form themselves.	Teach youth about credit by loaning them money to buy a larger item. Set an interest rate, a payment plan and consequences for late payments. At the end, show them the original cost and the total cost due to the interest.
Start a family savings jar to save up for special events, treats, or to give to charity. Plan together what the goal will be and discuss what each member can contribute.	Help youth open a checking account. Have them look at different banks and evaluate the fees, show them how to write checks, balance their checkbook, and use online banking.	Teach youth that doing it yourself saves money – if you make your lunch at home instead of buying it at school, you “earn” the money that you would’ve spent on lunch at school!
Encourage youth to have a savings plan, and to split their money into short-term and long-term savings, pocket money, and charitable giving.	Talk with youth about how credit can be helpful – such as in emergency situations or for buying things online or reserving hotel rooms.	Have youth keep receipts for a month and enter their purchases into a computer program to track their spending habits.
When youth want to make a large purchase, help them create a savings plan to determine how much they’ll need to save each week or month to get to their goal.	Have youth identify places that sell money orders, determine their fees, and choose the place they’ll buy the money order from should they need one.	Talk with youth about the importance of comparison shopping and to see what your money can get you at different stores or websites. Discuss quality vs. quantity.

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COMMUNITY RESOURCES	
Show youth several agencies that work with housing needs, such as tenant’s rights’ groups or loans for first time home buyers.	Help youth create a budget for buying a car, including costs for car maintenance and insurance. Discuss factors that influence insurance costs.
Ask youth where they would call for help in different scenarios – when would they call 911 and how would they know who to call? Which neighbors could they turn to for help in an emergency or if they needed to borrow sugar?	Help youth register to vote and discuss candidates and how to learn more about the issues they stand for.
Encourage youth to volunteer, and take them along when you volunteer. Have them identify activities that they would like to volunteer in.	Encourage youth to research information that they need and use often, such as movie times or where to get their hair cut, and keep a list handy.
Have youth research what is involved in getting their driver’s license, and make a list of the steps involved.	Set aside a drawer or file for each youth for them to store important documents, such as their birth certificate and Social Security card. As they get older, have the youth be in charge of maintaining their documents.
Teach youth their phone number and address and help them to memorize it (or have it written down for them). Talk with them about who to share their information with.	

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HOUSING		
Discuss the idea of having a roommate, and ask youth to list pros and cons to having roommates. Help youth to make a list of questions to ask a potential roommate.	Take youth to look at an apartment or home for rent. Walk through the space with them and have them write a list of things they would want to inspect before moving into a place.	Have youth practice completing a lease application to see what information they will need.
Talk with younger children as you pay housing bills, and have older youth create lists of housing expenses and what those might cost.	As youth prepare to move out, work with them to create a list of things they will need for their own place, as well as a budget that includes these items, and costs such as security deposits, utility hook-ups, and installation fees.	Discuss with youth the process of finding housing. Talk with them about how you found your first apartment or home. Show them how to use the internet or other resources to find housing.
Look at rental ads with older youth and discuss the terms and costs in the ad (such as security deposit and utilities), as well as those not in the ad (such as application fee or pet deposit).	Talk with youth about having a backup plan about paying for housing if they were laid off, fired, or quit their job. Take this opportunity to talk about the importance of having money saved for emergencies.	

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EMPLOYMENT	
Attend a career fair with youth to help them learn about different jobs and careers. Have youth make a list of questions to ask employers while at the career fair.	Pick up job applications with youth and help them fill them out. Ask them what information they will need to fill out the application and review it once they are finished.
Take youth to work with you if possible so that they can see what is involved in your workday and that of your coworkers. Encourage them to talk with your coworkers to learn about aspects of their job as well as your own.	Have youth keep an employment file of jobs and volunteering positions they have had. Help them create a resume and include individuals who are willing to act as references, and any clubs they belong to or have in the past.
Ask youth to list reasons why people need to work. If their friends work, have youth ask them why they got jobs, and ask youth what kinds of things their friends are able to do or not do when they have jobs.	Before youth have an interview, have them make a list of questions an interviewer may ask them, as well as a list that they want to ask. Also discuss the importance of following up after the interview, and ensure they do so.
When youth look for jobs, suggest using their interests to narrow the search – if they love pizza, they could work at a pizza place! Use this as a chance to discuss career goals and the steps they’ll need to take to reach those goals.	When youth get their first paycheck, celebrate! Make a special meal or go out to eat, and take the opportunity to explain the deductions on their paycheck, as well as other employee benefits that they qualify for in their job.
Ask youth to list different ways they could find out about job opportunities, such as the newspaper or online. Suggest asking friends with jobs about openings, or ask friends of yours if they might be hiring.	Talk with youth about what it means to be a good employee. When it comes time for youth to leave their jobs, discuss what it means to give notice and why it is important to leave a job on good terms.
When youth need to make a decision, have them list pros and cons and discuss outcomes. Evaluate the decisions with them and ask about the choices that led to the decision.	

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	EDUCATION	
Ask youth what they want to be when they grow up and look for opportunities to discuss different jobs/careers, such as when you're watching TV together or driving by businesses, or talking with people you know in different careers.	Be involved with the youth's school: attend educational meetings, conferences, and volunteer in the classroom or for school events or field trips.	Encourage youth to take advantage of programs and resources designed to inform and promote education beyond high school.
Monitor academic achievement and help youth with homework.	Help youth figure out what type of learner they are: visual, auditory, or kinesthetic, or 'hands-on' by how they study – do they look at pictures, read the directions, or just do it? Help them use their style to study most effectively.	Have youth develop their interests by participating in school, community and volunteer activities
Add report cards and transcripts to the youth's educational file.	Have youth study in different places, such as at a desk, listening to music, or at the kitchen table. After 15 minutes in each place, ask them where they were able to best concentrate and have that be their study spot.	Encourage and assist in exploration of postsecondary choices by touring campuses with your youth or allow them to go as part of a school or pre-college activities.
Identify opportunities for job shadowing and help your youth arrange to spend time shadowing a particular job or career.	If youth struggle with staying on task for studying and completing homework, set incentives. Discuss them with youth and have them choose ideas with you so that they are things they'll work toward.	Assist youth in requesting, obtaining and completing admissions and financial aid information and applications. Ask for help from a school counselor if needed.

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Assist in completing the annual Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA), which is mandatory to receive financial aid for college.	Encourage older youth to help younger children with schoolwork – this will help the older youth reinforce their learning and build self-esteem and will help the younger children learn their material. It’s a win-win situation!	Introduce your youth to the Occupational Outlook Handbook (http://www.bls.gov/ooh/) to learn about different careers and what each entails.
PREPARING MEALS		
During meals, talk with youth about the nutritional value of food and its importance in our growth and development.	Have youth prepare one item for a meal. For younger children, this could include making a salad or grating cheese, and older youth could make rice or brown meat, or help with more difficult tasks.	Have family members help clean up after meals: younger children can clear the table; older youth can wash and dry dishes and fill the dishwasher, and clean the counters and the kitchen.
When eating fast food, ask youth to guess the nutritional value of the foods. Look up the different parts of the meal and discuss the fat, calories, and other aspects of the meal.	Have youth choose a recipe to make a meal with you for the family. Older youth can follow the recipe and make the meal on their own.	Ask youth for suggestions for side or main dishes for the family menu, and eventually have youth plan the menu for a week.
When grocery shopping, have youth choose healthy snacks, and ask them what makes the snack healthy.	Have youth take turns setting the table for meals.	When eating out, encourage youth to order for themselves and help you calculate the tip.
Have youth make the grocery shopping list for the week, and have them shop with you and keep track of the cost of all of the groceries as you shop. As you shop, have youth compare brands to determine which item is the most economical, explaining that quality matters also.	Experiment with food storage: place a small amount of cooked and raw food in the fridge (stored appropriately) and leave them for about a week. Have the youth guess which will spoil first. Talk with youth about how soon food should be eaten, and if anything can be frozen to make it last longer.	

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HEALTH		
<p>Make hand-washing a part of youth’s routine after using the bathroom and before meals, and tooth-brushing a part of their morning and evening routines. Let youth pick out their toothbrush, toothpaste, and dental floss.</p>	<p>Help youth recognize how they feel when they are sick and to know their symptoms. Have older youth research their symptoms to see what they might do to feel better and to read medication labels to know the correct dosage.</p>	<p>Role play with youth different situations that they might be confronted with – ask what they might do if they are at a party and are offered a beer or drugs. Tell them how you’ve handled peer pressure in the past.</p>
<p>Encourage youth to find ways to deal with stressful situations, whether that be exercising, deep breathing, talking, or taking time alone. Show youth your ways to deal with stress.</p>	<p>If youth are taking prescription medicine, talk about why they are taking it, what it is for, and if and how it helps. Discuss possible side effects and how to recognize them.</p>	<p>Discuss basic anatomy with youth, teach them anatomical terms for their body parts, and give them honest, age-appropriate answers to their questions about sex and sexuality.</p>
<p>When you are out with youth in different weather conditions, demonstrate safety in each situation.</p>	<p>Keep a medical file for each youth, and as youth get older, have them add to this record as they attend their medical appointments.</p>	<p>When an older youth needs to schedule a non-urgent doctor’s visit, let them call to make the appointment.</p>
<p>Invite youth to exercise with you and participate in any rewards that you give yourself for consistent exercise. Give youth an opportunity to participate in sports or activities that they enjoy.</p>	<p>When you take youth to a medical appointment and you are filling out forms, ask them to answer the questions that they know the answers to as you fill out the forms. Older youth can fill out the forms and you can review.</p>	<p>Talk with youth about pregnancy, how women become pregnant, and how pregnancy can be prevented. Talk with them about making safe choices if they choose to be sexually active, as well as knowing early signs of pregnancy.</p>
<p>If you’re watching TV with youth and someone on a show is dealing with an emotional issue, use it as an opening to talk with youth about it.</p>	<p>Talk with youth about which medical facility (doctor’s office, urgent care, emergency room) is appropriate for which medical need.</p>	<p>Talk with youth about positive role models for healthy relationships. Model healthy relationships for youth in your home.</p>

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DAILY LIVING SKILLS		
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<div style="background-color: red; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="background-color: yellow; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="background-color: blue; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="background-color: green; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <p>Have youth help you replace batteries in smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.</p>	<div style="background-color: red; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="background-color: yellow; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="background-color: blue; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="background-color: green; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <p>Discuss proper hygiene with youth, including frequency of bathing and haircuts, kinds of hygiene products to use and how often to use them, dental care, and shaving.</p>	<div style="background-color: red; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="background-color: yellow; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="background-color: blue; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="background-color: green; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <p>Teach youth what different cleaning supplies are intended for and how to use each of them.</p>
<div style="background-color: red; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="background-color: yellow; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="background-color: blue; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="background-color: green; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <p>Teach youth how to read a map and practice this skill, as well as using GPS to find a destination. Help younger children learn to notice street signs and landmarks.</p>	<div style="background-color: red; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="background-color: yellow; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="background-color: blue; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="background-color: green; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <p>Have youth help you complete a home inventory, and discuss the importance of homeowner’s and renter’s insurance.</p>	<div style="background-color: red; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="background-color: yellow; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="background-color: blue; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="background-color: green; width: 10%; height: 10px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <p>Explain the importance of fire safety by showing youth the fire safety plan and route to leave the house in an emergency.</p>

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<p>Take a family field trip using public transportation to help youth become comfortable with it. Have youth choose the destination, and help them map the route and determine the fare.</p>

SOFT SKILLS		
<p>If you hear youth making negative comments about themselves, ask them what they mean, challenge them a little, and help them remember their strengths.</p>	<p>If you speak a language other than your youth does, teach them if they are interested. If your youth speak another language, ask them to teach you!</p>	<p>Take advantage of employment and volunteer programs to help youth practice job skills, communication skills, and interviewing practice.</p>
<p>Watch how you praise youth. Statements like “You aced that test – you’re such a good girl!” teach that we only value what they do well. Emphasize the importance of trying their best and feeling good about themselves by encouraging their effort.</p>	<p>Encourage youth to learn more about their heritage and others’ by exploring as a family the foods, dress, entertainment, worship practices, and holiday celebrations of their ethnic and cultural background and that of other cultures.</p>	<p>Help youth learn to negotiate – explain that many things in life are negotiable and it’s okay to ask to do things in a different way or at a different time. Discuss that not everything is negotiable however and sometimes they’ll have to do things when and how they are asked.</p>
<p>Help youth write a list of their strengths. Have them keep it in a safe place, and when they’re feeling down, have them pull out the list and remind themselves of their talents and assets.</p>	<p>Talk with youth about how we speak differently to different people. Discuss how we communicate differently with people based on their role and our relationship with them.</p>	<p>Talk with youth about personal questions and tell them they do not have to answer questions that make them uncomfortable. Role play to allow them to practice.</p>
<p>Ask youth about their dreams and short and long-term goals. Discuss the strengths they have that could help them to reach their goals, and share some of your own goals and dreams.</p>	<p>If youth struggle expressing emotion verbally, write notes to them or journal back and forth with them to help them express their feelings in a less threatening way.</p>	<p>Talk with youth about their personal support system and about people they can go to for help in different situations. Have them write down people’s names and phone numbers.</p>

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<p>If you or your youth experience discrimination, talk about how that feels and use it as a teachable moment. Also, if youth use racial slurs, challenge their thinking and talk with them about how we limit ourselves when we judge others on the basis of their appearance.</p>	<p>When talking with youth about their day, rephrase their answers to gather additional information and to get clarification – if they say “I hate school; I’m never going back,” try saying “It sounds like something bad happened. Can you tell me about it?”</p>	<p>Understand that youth may not understand physical boundaries. Begin with non-threatening kinds of touch, such as high-fives or side hugs. Discuss appropriate boundaries and how physical touch makes you feel, and set limits with youth.</p>
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