

**- CHAPTER 5 -**

**A REVIEW OF LIFE-SKILLS WITH SPECIFIC EMPHASIS ON  
EARLY-ADOLESCENTS**

**5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The society is riddled with many social and health problems as a result of HIV/AIDS. As mentioned in the previous chapters the number of AIDS orphans is on the increase. With no one to take care of them they are at risk of being victims of sexual abuse, infection with HIV, substance abuse, murder and violence, which are, rive in many communities (Anderson & Okoro, 2000:2). Apart from the specific deviant act itself, these pathologies present devastating consequences such as broken lives and even death, misery, trauma and financial losses. Without elaborating on the afore-mentioned circumstances, the researcher will suffice with a statement made on 4 May 1999 by the previous Minister of Health in South Africa, Dr Zuma (quoted from Sunday Times 24 October 1999).

She expressed her shock with amongst others the rapid increase of the HIV especially amongst teenagers. She further mentioned that this trend must be expected as permissiveness towards sex, liquor and substance usages as well as the other social unacceptable practices have become the order to the day. She further exclaimed that our life-style, influenced to a great extent by television, the media and peer pressure, has made it possible for young people to live and behave in a certain manner. In other words a great number of people, especially the youth, have accepted a life-style without realizing the devastating effects thereof. She further mentioned that even children in their formative years are left unguided and vulnerable to bad influences and exploitation

According to Anderson and Okoro (2000: 1) programmes to combat these problems have until now proved to be unsuccessful. Possible reasons for the failure of such programmes

and other efforts such as action groups to effectively curb or prevent these problems are amongst others the following:

- The tendency to mainly concentrate on curative and rehabilitative measures instead of primary preventive efforts;
- Concentration on short-term programmes hoping for miracle results. Long-term continuous programmes are considered tedious and too expensive;
- Confusion between the authorities and community of who should take the initiative and responsibility in dealing with these problems; and
- Problem areas are compartmentalized and dealt with separately. What is not realized is that social and health pathologies are the consequences of specific life styles, which demand a more holistic approach.

The absence of basic knowledge and life skills contribute to the vulnerability and exploitation of people, especially young people with regard to social and health problems. Deficiencies in life skills contribute to low self-esteem, loneliness, and parent child relationships. This condition also handicaps the development of satisfying interpersonal relationships and influences the effectiveness of role performance. However, it is possible to rectify this deficiency by giving young people access to skills development programmes. Preventative work with children should concentrate on teaching of life skills (Anderson & Okoro, 2000: 1- 2; Brack, 2000: 3-4; Gladding, 1997: 101; Potgieter, 2004: 217).

The point of departure when dealing with social and health problems should be based on efforts to internalize an accepted life style or to change the life-styles of people. The life style of people is influenced to a great deal by factors such as culture, values and socialization processes therefore whatever the nature of the problem, the solution, will be to purposefully employ a continuous positive preventive approach in order to stabilize or

change the life styles of people. Life skills help people to acquire necessary tools to take charge and effectively manage their lives (Anderson & Okoro, 2000: 1- 2; Brack & Hill, 2000: 3-4; Nelson-Jones, 1993: 10; Potgieter, 2004: 217; Stewart et al, 1996: 167).

A survey conducted by Brack and Hill (2000: 3-4) at schools in North West Province revealed that many young people lack informed knowledge concerning the potential dangers of existing pathologies. For instance children start experimenting with sex at an early stage without realizing the possible consequences of their actions; furthermore, young people in varying degrees, show uncertainty with regard to important life skills such as responsible decision-making. This is reflected for instance where the majority of learners expressed their acceptance of pre-marital sex. Finally the researchers concluded by stating that young people need life skills to help them to identify deviations and efficiently deal with it. It is therefore vital to equip adolescents with life skills that will stand them in good stead for the rest of their life (Brack & Hill, 2000: 3-4; Potgieter, 2004: 217).

According to Brack and Hill (2000: 1) the life skills concept which emphasizes the wonder of the human body and the enormous potential of every human being, is a positive preventive approach to problems such as substance abuse, AIDS, child sexual abuse, crime and violence. The aim is to instill in young people a deep respect for the complexity and beauty of the human body and for life itself, so that they will consider it unthinkable to abuse their bodies in whatever way. Furthermore, life skills are conveyed to children to value their own individuality and respect the dignity and rights of other people. The focus of life skills helping is not just the present. Helpers can assist clients to learn self-helping skills to prevent and manage future problems (Nelson-Jones, 1993: x; Nelson-Jones, 1995: 352).

Since the study is about AIDS orphans in their early-teenage years this chapter focuses on life-skills that are needed to stabilize or change their life-styles. It is divided in the following sections:

- The concept life skills.
- Historical development of life skills.
- Theoretical perspectives regarding life skills.
- Life skills theory.
- Importance of life skills to adolescents.
- Classification of life skills
- Effective life skills
- Areas of knowledge in adolescent life skills development.
- Life skills education.
- Life skills programme
- Life skills in the context of a helping approach.

According to Hoelson and Van Schalkwyk (2001: 245) the popularity of life skills and their applications in diverse situations over the past three decades have led to many different definitions of life skills. They further mention that there are as many definitions of life skills as there are life skill practitioners. To develop a common understanding of what life skills mean to people and then to formulate a working definition of life skills, the concept life skills is reviewed in the next section.

## **5.2 THE CONCEPT LIFE SKILLS**

While many experts discuss the importance of life skills, many still question what exactly represent such skills. As shall be shown, there is no single answer, but there are a variety of overlapping definitions, which highlight the most significant forms of life skills.

In practice, the term life skills is also used in several other ways, including to refer to livelihood skills, such as how to set up a business; to refer to practical self-care skills such as how to plan and prepare healthy meals or how to brush one's teeth, etc; to refer to skills used to deal with specific risk situations, such as saying "no" in the face of peer pressure etc. (WHO, 1994: 1).

The concept life skills involves personally responsible choices. These skills enable people to maximize their own choices, to enhance their personal well-being and to improve their quality of life. When people are being personally responsible they are in the process of making choices that maximize their happiness and fulfillment. Personal responsibility is a positive concept wherein people are responsible for their well-being and for making their own choices within the givens of their existence. Life skills therefore, are the component skills through which people assume – rather than avoid – personal responsibility for their lives. These skills enable people to make positive contribution which can lead to improvement of their lives (Nelson-Jones, 1993:10-11; Nelson-Jones, 1995: 355-356; Potgieter, 2004: 217; Anderson & Okoro, 2000: 19)

Elias (1990) as mentioned by WHO (1994: 1) notes that life skills are skills to carry out effective interpersonal relationships and to make choices and resolve conflict without resorting to actions that will harm oneself or others. Adding to this WHO (1994: 1) further defines life skills as skills that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. This generic type of skills includes decision-making, problem-solving, self-awareness and communication skills. TACADE (1990: 2) views life skills as personal and social skills required by young people to function confidently and competently with themselves, with other people and with the wider community.

Peck and Hong (1988:99) cited in Tsatsi (2001: 44) state that life skills are skills, which enable people to care for themselves in a supportive environment, and are concerned with independence in self-care, understanding the environment and living with others. Skills also enable people to make decisions concerning life situations. From a practical point of view Peck and Hong (1988: 107) as mentioned by Tsatsi (2001: 44) outlined the following life skills. Firstly personal skills, which refer to those skills that are necessary to establish and maintain a network of appropriate and meaningful relationships, interests and support systems e.g. developing friendships, leisure interests, environmental and road safety, communication, social life, sexual relationships and marriage. Personal skills are also of great importance for especially young people to fully understand the influence of

peer pressure. Secondly, home management skills, which include theoretical and technical knowledge necessary to live safely, comfortable and healthy. Skills such as budgeting, nutrition and hygiene may serve as examples. Thirdly, self-reliance skills, which include those skills, which are necessary for the individual to be able to organize his/her own life and to maintain and utilize the resources, they need.

The effective acquisition and application of life skills influence the way people feel about themselves and others, and equally influence the way people are perceived by others. According to WHO (1997: 3-4) life skills contribute to peoples' perceptions of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem. Life skills therefore, play an important role in the promotion of individuals' mental well-being. The promotion of mental well-being contributes to people motivation to look after themselves and others, the prevention of mental disorders, and the prevention of health behavior problems. Life skills open doors and enable people to help themselves (Potgieter, 2004: 217).

Life skills are also framed as “abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life” (WHO, 1997: 1-2). Described in this way, skills that can be said to be life skills are innumerable and the nature and definition of life skills are likely to differ across cultures and settings. However, analysis of the life skills field suggests that there is a core set of skills that are at the heart to skills-based initiatives for the promotion of the health and well-being of children and adolescents (Brack & Hill, 2000: 9-10).

**In the context of this study life skills** are self-helping skills that enable people to help themselves. As such they are aimed at empowering people. People who possess life skills are more adequate to fulfill their potential and meet their needs. Potgieter (2004: 217) notes that a wide variety of skills can be selected for inclusion in a life skills programme for adolescents. The selection depends largely on the target condition, which the client system faces. For this study life skills include acquisition of self-reliance skills such as decision-making, problem solving, critical thinking, self-awareness, assertiveness

training, communication conflict resolution etc. A detailed discussion of these skills will follow later in this chapter.

A final topic of interest in conceptualizing the concept life skills is the place of belonging in defining life skills. Both the WHO (1994) and American School Counseling Associations (ASCA, 1994) as mentioned by Anderson and Okoro (2000: 13) imply that all life skills no matter at what level or dimension, must include the ability to facilitate a sense of belonging. Belonging plays a key role in the growth and development of self esteem, social skills and initiative while creating a sense of belonging does not mean being a “buddy” and always getting along, it does mean that a person is always welcomed into a group as long as they do not try to harm or disrupt the group. It also means that assertive communication and truth exist. It includes a sense of safety, both physical and emotional (Brack and Hill, 2000: 24; Anderson & Okoro, 2000: 12-13).

The need for belonging is also emphasized by Alfred Adler (1870-1937) as cited by Brack and Hill (2000: 24) who concluded that, as part of human nature there is a strong innate potential for kinship and belonging to the human race. Each person is born with a natural desire to belong to a group, such as family or culture, and to contribute to the growth and well-being of that group. It is a genetic need or genetic potential and it simply exists in everyone at birth. As noted above, an innate or genetic potential is a potential capability, which is likely to be developed if a person is given the right opportunities. Without the right opportunities this need can be distorted or destroyed (Baron & Byrne, 2003: 268; Brack & Hill, 2000: 24).

According to Brack and Hill (2000: 25) what is important to note here is that belonging, the ability to pursue meaningful relationships and contribute to society, is not automatic, it needs to be consciously developed and when it is developed, it is intrinsically rewarding. However, people have to actually learn ways of trusting others, giving and accepting care and being sincere. Adler (1870-1937) as cited by the above-mentioned authors, states that learning these skills is intrinsically rewarding because the skills fulfill a genetic potential. Furthermore, because this need is rooted in a strong genetic potential

the fulfillment of the need for belonging is also a prerequisite for emotional well-being. When the need for belonging is not met, a person may easily become aloof, manipulative and self-centered. When the feeling of belonging and interpersonal connectedness develops, a sense of social interest, co-operation and equality emerges. Belonging is met by obtaining results, which provides closer relationships with others, and competence is met by obtaining results, which are useful in many ways.

Basically belonging consists of forming a bond with other individuals. Belonging is a social component of normal human development. It allows a person to express his or her social interest in a healthy and mutually reciprocal manner that builds upon strength of all group members.

Following on defining the concept life skills the next section examines the history and development of life skills programmes.

### **5.3 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF LIFE SKILLS**

According to Hoelson and Van Schalkwyk (2001: 246) life skills originate from Winthrop Adkins, a student of Donald Super, who developed the Adkins Life Skills Programme: Employability Skills Series during the 1960s. The programme began as an anti-poverty training initiative based on Super's tasks of vocational development. Initially its focus was on equipping educationally disadvantaged adults and youth with skills for choosing, finding, planning and getting a job. Later it expanded to include skills required for the challenges of normal life span development, such as skills relevant to marriage, parenthood and other personal developmental skills (Hoelson & Van Schalkwyk, 2001: 246).

Nelson-Jones (1990) as mentioned by Hoelson and Van Schalkwyk (2001: 246) offers five reasons for the progress of life skills programmes over the past three decades:

- An emphasis on development rather than remediation or rehabilitation.



- The preventive nature of programmes aimed at the personal and social developmental needs of all learners.
- The widespread incidence of problems in living.
- A more active and perceived cost-effective orientation that could increase facilitator accountability.
- The rapid growth of cognitive-behavioural approaches to intervention.

Hoelson and Van Schalkwyk (2001: 246) state that local need for life skills is associated with the gradual erosion of traditional systems of cultural education. This has been brought about by urbanization, acculturation to a western-oriented lifestyle and intra-group changes in rituals, customs and authority structures. To equip people adequately to meet the challenges of modern societies life skills programmes are viewed as significant. The aim of life skills programmes is self-helping, whereby clients maintain and develop skills, not just to cope with present problems but also to prevent and handle future problems (Nelson-Jones, 1995: 352).

Now that the historical development of life skills programmes has been reviewed, it is appropriate to examine theoretical perspectives to life skills. A theoretical review of all theoretical approaches is beyond the scope of this study. Hence the core propositions from those theories that most influenced the researcher's approach to life skills are briefly reviewed. The aim is to give good overview underlying life skills so that the connection between theory and practice can be seen.

#### **5.4 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES**

Theories and models help people to understand how a particular phenomenon is developed or formed and how it affects other phenomena that are linked to it. Helpers need a guiding theory to help them make sense of the complex helping process. The main value of a theory is to give direction in helping. In this section ecological perspective, empowerment approach and experiential/observational learning theory are

looked at in order to get a better understanding of how life skills enhance human capabilities i.e. physically, socially and psychologically.

#### **5.4.1 Ecological Perspective**

The ecological perspective stresses the goodness of fitting between the person and his environment. It focuses more on promoting people's adaptive capacities and enhancing the mutuality between people and the environment. This perspective views individual human beings as living in constant reciprocity with their environment. This means that both people and their environment influence and shape one another. Therefore it views human development and functioning as the result of the interaction between the individual and his environment (Compton & Galaway, 1994: 4; Potgieter, 2004: 10).

Rooth (1995: 10) provides an explanation of human-environment relationships in relation to life skills. She emphasizes the importance of life skills in human environment relationships. In this regard the ecological perspective provides an understanding of the possibility of human environment interactions and relations being improved by the cross – fertilization between life skills and environmental interactions. It is emphasized that human beings are organic outgrowths of physical and social environments and not detached or independent entities (Rooth, 1995: 5). This implies that no person is an island on himself but is constantly influenced by the physical and social environments. The environment moulds and shape people's behavior.

According to Leff (1978) cited in Rooth (1995: 6) an understanding of ecological processes and continuing awareness of how these processes operate in one's life and surroundings are of great importance. She further mentioned that to separate life skills intervention from environmental contextuality is to do a disservice both to both people and the environment. In other words human beings are not separate and independent from their environment. In explaining life skills in terms of the ecological perspective, emphasis is placed on the following concepts: clarity, locus of control and participants feelings of being in charge of their environments (Rooth, 1995: 6).

The concept of clarity, stresses that an environment that is involved and that makes sense will foster the achievement of clarity just as the absence of this factor will incline the balance towards confusion and chaos (Rooth, 1995: 6). In other words an environment that is conducive for people to learn, participate and make decisions will enable them to be clear of what they want and need and in turn will be responsive to their needs.

The concept of locus of control involves how a person will respond to a specific situation (Rooth, 1995: 6). A high internal locus of control causes people to adopt proactive strategies. According to Baron and Byrne (2003: 414) these people believe that they can choose to behave in ways that maximize good outcomes and minimize bad ones. Bandura (1995: 21) indicates that self efficacy, which is marked by internality of locus of control is related to positive self concept, being less anxious, having less psychosomatic symptoms and coping better with stress. Bandura (1995: 218) further, mentions that an affirmative sense of self-efficacy contributes towards psychological well-being and performance accomplishments. This implies that life skills education is intrinsically concerned with encouraging internality of locus control, efficacy and proactivity for greater community and environmental benefits. From this it can be deduced that life skills in the context of the human environment paradigm, is concerned with enhancing people's locus of control so that they could develop strategies and skills of how to deal with environmental pressure.

According to Rooth (1995: 7) locus of control, self-efficacy and self-concept are constructs that cannot be removed from the environment in which they are adhered to. Life skills accretion is closely connected to environmental situated-ness. In conclusion Nelson-Jones (1993: 41) indicates that life skills enhancement are usually maintained both by what people do to themselves and by what the environment keeps doing to them.

The following sub-section endeavor to throw more light on the concept and process of empowerment by looking at the following:

- The concept empowerment.
- The relationship between life skills and empowerment.
- Assumptions.

#### **5.4.2 Empowerment approach**

According to Potgieter (2004: 216) “empowerment is a process of increasing personal, interpersonal and collective power which allows individuals families, groups and communities to maximize their quality of life.” Carl (2002: 4) views the term empowerment as a process that envisions growth and development. According to Gore (1989: 3) the concept empowerment means to give authority and to enable. It enables people to gain the capacity to interact with their environment in ways that enhance their need gratification, well-being and satisfaction. People are helped to obtain a sense of personal power and self-worth by reinforcing positive feelings about their identity. Empowerment is therefore seen not as external intervention whereby something is “done to people” but rather as a process in which people are involved, that generates growth and enablement (Carl, 2002: 4; Gore, 1989: 3; Hoelson & Van Schalkwyk, 2001: 250, Ledbetter, 2002: 200; Potgieter, 2004: 216; Toseland & Rivas, 2005: 145). In this description of empowerment, the emphasis is on power being taken and its use is determined the goals of the possessor.

Life skills education is deeply rooted in the empowerment approach. Its aim is to empower people towards growth and development. According to Hepworth and Larsen, (1993: 495) empowerment is closely linked to competence, self-esteem, support systems and belief that individual actions can lead to improvement in one’s life situation. Empowerment assumes that people have options available to them and that they can unlock the necessary resources to ensure maximum control over their own lives. Empowerment is basically a self-activity, which encompasses the development and stimulation of another person’s capabilities. It enhances the ability of individuals to develop the power to act on their own behalf in society. Life skills helping aims to empower people with skills to cope better with their immediate and future problems. It

seeks to develop clients' self-helping skills so that they can become their own helpers (Gutierrez, Parsons & Cox, 1998: 4; Nelson-Jones, 1993: 4; Pinderhughes, 1995: 136).

Lagana (1989) in Carl (2002: 5) defines empowerment as the process of providing people with the opportunity and necessary resources to enable to believe and feel that they understand their world and have the power to change it; for example greater autonomy and independence in decision-making. Empowerment therefore deals with change, in that it focuses on the development of the individual as well as collective potential (Carl, 2002: 5). Empowered persons feel that they can actively take part and can make a contribution and that they can make a real difference.

According to DuBois and Miley (1996: 25) the following are the assumptions which empowerment approach rests upon:

- Empowerment requires a climate which focuses on strengths and assets of people;
- Client systems are competent and have the capacity to act in their own interest, given the opportunities and access to resources;
- Competence rests on acquired life skills – the ability to make sound decisions and solve problems;
- Empowerment supposes a relationship between equals who work together as partners;
- Empowerment requires resources and the ability to utilize these effectively;
- Empowerment is a dynamic, synergistic, evolutionary process;
- Environmental deficiencies tend to foster powerlessness, helplessness and low self-esteem;
- Empowerment does not result in power struggles. Increasing the power on one system does not mean decreasing the power of another;
- It does not ignore expertise in the helper but utilizes it as an important resource.

Grafft (1993) in Carl (2002: 13) suggests various steps that may be followed to promote and stimulate empowerment process:

- Building up confidence;
- The promotion of social interaction;
- The maintenance and promotion of good personal relationships;
- The maintenance of good communication;
- Carrying out effective conflict resolution;
- Drawing and following up clear objectives;
- The maintenance of health working relationships.

Empowerment requires client systems to believe in their own capacity to affect change. It shifts the attention away from viewing as the targets of charity and helping efforts. The acquisition of life skills provides the stepping-stones for the client systems to move from powerlessness to empowerment. Empowerment is characterized by treating people equitably with commitment, skills and often a touch of inspiration. This requires attaining programmes that are specifically designed to enhance people's capabilities. A life skills programme should form part of the basic resources and facilities, which social agencies offer to the community (Gutierrez, Parsons & Cox, 1998: 133; Hoelson & Van Schalkwyk, 2001: 250; Potgieter, 2004: 217).

From the a above it is clear that empowerment is that process of development and growth through which a person goes which enables him/her to take independent decisions and to act autonomously with a view to making a contribution towards the development of his particular environment. This process is coupled with the development of applicable skills, attitudes and knowledge within a positive climate.

In the next subsection experiential learning in life skills is discussed.

### **5.4.3 Experiential Learning theory**

According to Johnson and Johnson (2003: 50) people learn from their experiences. Rooth (1995: 13) explains experiential learning as being more of expanding on observational learning from experiences. She states that experiential learning is the

process of holistic learning from experiences. Beginning with a real experience is the key feature. Experiential learning involves doing the actual task and then discussing the experience and learning is derived.

Rooth (1995: 13) further explains that this theory is rooted in an epistemological perspective of emancipatory education, which permeates modes of implementation and has manifold implications for its use and practice. Research indicates that young people may learn more from life skills when their experiences are acknowledged and used in the learning process. The existing experiences should be incorporated whereas opportunities to practice life skills in the confines of a safe environment should be created.

According to Burnard (1989: 12-15) experiential learning has the following characteristics:

- The accent of the learning is on action. Problems are encountered through discussion, argument and action, and the learner is no longer passive, but involved in a dialogue with equally active teachers.
- Learners are expected and encouraged to reflect on their experience, although experience alone is not enough to ensure that learning takes place. New experiences must be integrated with past experiences through the process of reflection, which is an introspective act in which the learner can indulge individually or as a member of a group.
- The facilitator of the learning process uses a phenomenological approach, restricts himself or herself to the use of description and summaries of what the learner has said, and to enable learner to invest in their own learning. It is the learner who ascribes meaning to the process and the facilitator's ideas that are foisted on the learner.

- Learning is a subjective, life long, human process that involves the whole person and not just an outcome or content. The learner creates a view of the world in his or her own terms, and needs to develop the ability to ask critical question about the “facts” that are presented to him or her.
- Human experience is valued as a source of learning.

Reflection as an important ingredient of experiential learning is explained as a facet having a potential for enhancing learning. It refers to the ability to think about what has been experienced and learned, to become aware of feelings, the realization and insights as well as an idea of knowledge acquisition and future work required for skill enhancement (Rooth, 1995: 14). It enables participants to consolidate and internalize learning and promotes skills development and extension. Therefore from this theory of learning, one can deduce that young people may acquire knowledge on various life skills such as problem solving, decision-making, effective communication and assertiveness, through the process of experiential learning.

Through considering their experiences by using “reflection” as a facet of experiential learning i.e. to mirror back their feelings and experiences that originally put them at risk of being the victims or being vulnerable to social pathologies, they can learn from such experiences and make better choices. For example, a teenager who has been influenced by peer pressure to abuse drugs may learn from his experiences of how peers can sometimes be destructive in one’s life and as a result may learn or practice assertiveness in order not to repeat their past mistakes (Rooth, 1995: 14).

According to Johnson and Johnson (2003: 51) experiential learning is emphasized because people believe in knowledge they have discovered themselves than in knowledge presented by others. An approach to learning life skills based on inquiry and discovery increases the students’ motivation to learn and their commitment to implement their conclusion in the future. Experiential learning offers the opportunity for experiencing success by allowing people to decide what aspect of their experiences they wish to focus



on and what skills they wish to develop. To learn to be a more effective decision maker, for example, the learner must develop a concept of what decision making is and decision making behaviors that will lead to effective decision making (Johnson & Johnson, 2003: 56).

The discussion above makes it evident that life skills are dynamic and important. They enable people to care for themselves in a supportive environment and are concerned with independence in self-care, understanding the environment and living with others. The following discussion will therefore give a description of life skills theory.

## **5.5 LIFE SKILLS THEORY**

Life skills theory is an integrative approach for assisting clients to develop self-helping skills. It is an approach that integrates many of the insights and strengths of the above-mentioned approaches. It is integrative because it combines and reworks ideas from other approaches into a coherent theoretical whole. According to Nelson-Jones (1995: 349-350) life skills counseling owes much to others' work for example, the emphasis on the importance of supportive helping ships and on sensitively attending to clients shows the influence of Carl Roger's person-centered approach; the emphasis on thinking skills is derived from the writings of Albert Ellis; the emphasis on action skills represents the influence of the behaviorists; and the emphasis on personal responsibility choice and courage has origins in the work of Viktor Frankl, William Glasser and Gerald Egan.

Life skills theory focuses on the acquisition of life skills. These skills assist people to become more balanced, independent and able to solve problems creatively in their lives (Hoelson & Van Schalkwyk, 2001: 249). The theory and practice of life skills counseling is expressed in skills language. Skills language consistently uses the concept of skills to describe and analyze how people think and act. In each skill area people can possess skills strengths and skills deficits. Processes by which people acquire life skills strengths and deficits include supportive relationships, learning from example and consequences, instruction and self-instruction, information and opportunity and experiences. Processes

by which people maintain life skills deficits include insufficient use of skills language, thinking skill deficits and unchanged environmental circumstances (Nelson-Jones, 1995: 349-350 & Potgieter, 2004: 217). These processes will be discussed later in this chapter.

According to Nelson-Jones (1995: 349-350) life skills theory has dual goals: developing the skills to cope with specific problems now and in future, and developing skilled persons. The skilled person possesses significant life skills strength to cope in all areas of his/her life. The approach assumes that theory is as much for clients' benefit as for that of their helpers. Where possible, helpers transmit life skills theory to their clients. The ultimate goal of life skills theory is self-helping, whereby clients maintain and develop skills, not just to cope with present problems but also to prevent and handle future problems (Nelson-Jones, 1995: 352).

According to Johnson and Johnson (2003: 53) people are not born with skills, nor do they magically appear when they are needed. Life skills are learned just as any other skill is learned. All skills are learned according to the same way, according to the following steps:

- Understand why the skill is important and how it will be of value to you. To want to learn a skill, you must see a need for it. You need to know that you will be better off with the skill than without it.
- Understand what the skill is, what are the component behaviors you have to engage in to perform the skill, and when it should be used. To learn a skill, you must have a clear idea of what the skill is and you must know how to perform it.
- Find situations in which you can practice the skill over and over again while a “coach” watches and tells you how well you are performing it.
- Assess how well the skill is being implemented. The key to assessing how well you engage in the skills is to realize that you can never fail. Rather, your behavior

approximates what you ideally wish and, through practice and experiential learning, the approximations get closer and closer to the ideal.

- Keep practicing until the skill feels real and it become an automatic habit pattern.
- Load your practice toward success. Set up practice unit that you can easily master. It always helps to feel like a success as you practice a skill.
- Get friends to encourage you to use the skill. Your friends can help you learn by giving you encouragement to do so. The more encouragement you receive, the easier it will be for you to practice the skill.
- Help others learn the skills. It is only when people develop others that they permanently succeed. Nothing is completely learned until it is taught to someone else. By helping others learn skills, you enhance your own expertise. (Johnson & Johnson, 2003: 54-55).

The essential element of any skill is the ability to make and implement sequences to achieve objectives. Good choices in skills are areas of skills strengths and poor choices are skills deficits. The object of life skills theory is to help clients, in one or more skills areas, move more in the direction of skills strength rather than skills deficits. For instance, if clients are to be good at asserting themselves or managing stress, they have to make and implement effective choices in the life skills areas (Nelson-Jones, 1995: 355).

In the following section, focus is on why life skills are particularly relevant and important to adolescents' lives. In the context of this study discussion of the importance of life skills suggests ways in which life skills can be tailored to the needs of AIDS orphans.

## **5.6 THE IMPORTANCE OF LIFE SKILLS TO ADOLESCENTS**

Nelson-Jones (1993: 10) notes that people require a repertoire of life skills and these skills should be appropriate both to their developmental tasks and to any special problems, challenges and transitions they may face.

Clearly adolescence is a time of change and crisis, which may be adaptively, encountered by some but for others presents the possibility of undesirable psychological, social and emotional consequences. The adolescent years can be extremely lonely ones, and it is not unusual for an adolescent to feel that no one is there to help. The importance of adequate socialization during childhood and adolescence cannot be overemphasized. During this process the adolescent should be equipped with life skills that will stand him or her in good stead for the rest of his or her life. Children, who are deprived adequate or sufficient socialization, fail to learn these vital social skills and are at risk to experience a variety of personal and interpersonal difficulties. Deficiencies in life skills contribute to low self-esteem, loneliness and strained marital relations. These conditions also handicap the development of satisfying interpersonal relationships and influence the ineffectiveness of role performance (Corey, 2004: 7; Geldard & Geldard, 1999: 15; Hepworth & Larsen, 1993: 454; Potgieter, 2004: 217).

Life skills can provide children with the opportunity to express their feelings. Life skills are especially suited for adolescents because they give them a place to express conflicting feelings. Adolescence is a time when key decisions are made that can affect the course of one's life. Receiving assistance at this stage, they stand a better chance of coping effectively with the developmental tasks they must face later in life (Anderson & Okoro, 2000: 1; Corey, 2004: 7; Geldard & Geldard, 1999: 13).

According to Brack and Hill (2000: 2) life skills are vital because they help prepare children for their puberty and adolescent stage. Life skills also help children to become defensible from being the victims of various pathologies. In addition Herbert (1988: 182) notes that life skills help children to become more flexible and socially competent so that

they may have fewer resources to self-defeating behaviors and feelings. Furthermore, they help young people to develop skills for interacting with people and for them to change specific person-to-person behaviors that influence the quality of relationships such as assertiveness and effective communication.

The Department of Welfare (White Paper – Social Welfare) as quoted by Brack and Hill (2000: 3) views the importance of life skills in a broader context. Life skills were viewed as critical component of a comprehensive solution. The well-being of children depends on the ability of families to function effectively. Because children are vulnerable they need to grow in a nurturing and secure family that can ensure their survival, development, protection and participation in family and social life. Not only do families give their members a sense of belonging, they are also responsible for imparting values and life skills. Families create security; they set limits on behavior; and together with the spiritual foundation they provide, instill notion of discipline. All these factors are essential for the health development of the family and of any society (Brack & Hill, 2000: 3-4).

However, as already indicated in the previous chapters, the tragedy is that many of South African families are already in crisis. Brack and Hill (2000: 4) note that unfortunately, the Department of Welfare does not have unlimited resources. In view of fiscal constraints, it is not possible for the welfare function to grow in real terms in the medium term. Real growth will be accommodated by restructuring the welfare function.

Not only has the Department of Welfare recognized the importance of life skills, but also the Department of Education has taken a more interest in promoting life skills. According to Hoelson and Van Schalkwyk (2001: 253) in South African schools, life skills education and training are generally offered as part of the Guidance curriculum as set out in the Department of Education Interim Core Syllabus for the Guidance (1995). Guidance which is supposed to be an integral part of the school curriculum is defined as essentially a preventative group programme that is appropriate to the need of learners in a democratic society (Hoelson & Van Schalkwyk, 2001: 253). The Guidance programme

aims to assist systematically the learner's personal academic and career development. However, according to the above-mentioned authors over a number of years this idea seems to have remained unattainable for the majority of South African schools.

Clearly, government structures are cognizant of the needs for Life Skills Education, and are trying to formulate policies and programmes, which can address these concerns, yet such programmes must be cost effective, efficient, and productive.

Life skills programmes are viewed as important to AIDS orphans. These children in most cases live without basic human rights and dignity (Van Dyk, 2001: 335). Furthermore, these children have gone through a traumatic experience of watching their parents succumb to the disease. As already mentioned, in the earlier chapters their loss is exacerbated by prejudice and social exclusion. Although the teaching of generic life skills has been incorporated in the education system of this country there are many children such as school-drop outs, orphans and street children who can not be reached by the formal educational system (Van Dyk, 2001: 9). The ability of life skills to assist AIDS orphans to cope is seen as critical.

According to Nelson-Jones (1995: 365) people require thorough knowledge to develop life skills. In the next section critical areas of knowledge that informs adolescents about life and that may also help them to gain more control over their behaviors are discussed.

## **5.7 AREAS OF KNOWLEDGE IN ADOLESCENTS' LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

Most people need assistance at some point in their lives to deal with troublesome issues that stifle their personal growth and limit their potential. Geldard and Geldard (1999: 183) note that adolescents are on a journey of self-discovery and are mostly hungry to learn about themselves and their relationships with others. Gaining such knowledge helps them to develop identity and make sense of the world around them. The following

areas of knowledge are pivotal in enhancing the process of adolescents' development and by implication the mastering of life skills.

### **5.7.1 Knowledge of the human body**

It is imperative that young people know and understand the composition and functioning of the body and how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Attention here is given to matters such as sufficient rest, a healthy balanced diet, the importance of exercise and mental stimulation. Young people should also be informed about how and why the body functioning is affected by substances that upset its delicate equilibrium. The approach should be to demonstrate and explain the physical, mental and emotional effects of any abuse such as drugs or indiscriminate sexual act on the human body. Furthermore participants need to be made aware of their needs and how they should meet these needs within the framework of an accepted value system (Anderson & Okoro, 2000: 22).

### **5.7.2 Healthy life style**

The focus here is to maintain a healthy life style. Attention should be given to those matters, which are important to maintain and develop a healthy body. Matters such as nutrition, rest, constructive leisure time activities and safe living in general should be included into this section. In this regard teenagers need basic knowledge and insight of substances and circumstances, which can and will harm the normal functioning of the body and retard development. The more important destructive factors that are identified as those that need special attention are amongst others substance abuse, illness and disease with emphasis on HIV/AIDS, child abuse and neglect emphasizing child sexual abuse, stress management and finally satanism (Anderson & Okoro 2000: 23).

### **5.7.3 Time management and setting lifestyle goals**

Time management implies planning the best utilization of time, including cutting down on time wasting, devoting more time to the really important tasks and completing more

tasks in the time available. Failure to manage time can leave people so short of time that they have a “last minute rush” to get a really important job done. Inevitably, something gets overlooked, causing another crisis, which in turn takes yet more time and money to rectify. In order to manage time effectively, thereby being more productive, proactive and successful implies setting goals or objectives as part of planning (Swart, 2000: 25-26).

Healthy individuals are regarded as committed to some meaningful goals or objectives that will both enhance the self and contribute to their overall well-being. Adolescents are at a stage in their lives when they are confronted by new experiences and situations. In addition, they have an unknown future which threatens to present them with unexpected challenges. Because they are moving through unknown territory in their lives, they often have problems in finding an overall direction, which makes sense for them. If they lack an overall sense direction, and do not have clear lifestyle goals, they may become excessively troubled by the uncertainty of their lives. To be successful young people must have a good sense of both short and long-term goal as well as direct their effort in a meaningful way toward appropriate goals (Doyle, 1992: 32; Geldard & Geldard, 1999: 176).

The essence of a goal is that it is an ideal. It is a desired end toward which people are working, a state of affairs that people value. It specifies ways in which individuals will interact with each other. Lifestyle goals provide a general sense of direction within which other less global decisions can be made. They also help to provide motivation to succeed. Goals breathe life into people hopes and dreams. To be useful goals have to be specific, understandable, clear and challenging enough. Defining goals clearly helps people to focus on what they are attempting to achieve. However, for goals to be achieved people must work hard enough and have necessary support (Geldard & Geldard, 1999: 176; Johnson & Johnson, 2003: 76-78; Swart, 2000: 26; Toseland & Rivas, 2005: 207).



According to Toseland and Rivas (2005: 268-269) steps in helping people to achieve their goals include: maintaining people's awareness of the goals they have identified and agreed to work on, and by facilitating the development of specific plans to achieve those goals. The plan should specify what to be done, when, where, how often and under what conditions. A person should be clear about his/her roles, responsibilities and expected contribution. However, to be successful the plan should be realistic.

#### **5.7.4 Assertiveness**

Some people's typical response to everyday interactions is withdrawal. These people may have low self-esteem or feelings of inferiority that inhibits them or have experienced negative consequences as a result of speaking out or are inhibited by from doing so by anxiety. People who are withdrawn and passive need to be encouraged to recognize their rights as people as well as accept the right of others (Thompson & Rudolph, 2000: 228).

Assertiveness has often been misunderstood and misidentified with concepts as "aggression". Yet in fact assertiveness is the anti-thesis of aggression, which is a common problem with at risk youth. Assertive behavior relates to standing up for one's rights, whilst not being insensitive or indifferent to the thoughts and feelings of others. Aggressive behavior, on the other hand, is viewed in terms of meeting one's own needs at the expense of others, and is almost always accompanied by disrespect in some way. The aggressive person is one who demands his or her rights at the cost of another. Only the assertive person seeks to assert his or her right in conjunction with another. Simply stated assertive behavior is expressing oneself without hurting or stepping on others. Assertiveness is therefore about interacting with another in a manner where both individuals can negotiate to have his or her rights met (Anderson & Okoro, 2000: 24; Couch, Felstehausen & Hallman, 1997: 5; Geldard & Geldard, 1999: 173; Gillis, 1994: 41; Hill & O' Brien, 1999: 273; Hoelson & Van Schalkwyk, 2001: 265; Zastrow, 2000: 477-478). Assertiveness as a skill will be discussed later in this chapter.

### **5.7.5 Interests, values and ideals**

According to Anderson and Okoro (2000: 24) the focus of this area of knowledge is to establish and develop sound/accepted value orientation towards life situations. The objectives are to define what is meant by a value and to relate general behavior and lifestyle to underlying values. Teenagers need to know themselves and know what their values are in relation to the more important life issues. The specific objectives are to encourage exploration of individual values and to encourage personal growth and, if necessary, change. Within this category emotional maturity, growth and development should also be attended to (Anderson & Okoro, 2000: 24).

### **5.7.6 Self-esteem**

Van Niekerk, Van Eeden and Botha (2001: 73) state that it is rare for individuals to hold neutral attitudes towards themselves. According to Baron and Byrne (2003: 171) the most important attitude a person develops is the attitude about self. This evaluation of oneself is known as self-esteem. Couch, Felstehausen and Hallman (1997: 5) describe esteem as a feeling that one is important, valued and respected. Self-esteem is a general term used to describe the personal assessment of value or worth people place on themselves. It also refers to the extent to which people have accepted themselves for who they are and what they are not. The child's ability to enter into and sustain meaningful relationships is dependent on their self-esteem. This value can be expressed either positively, for example: "I am a capable person" or negatively as in "I am a loser. Of great importance for a young person is to know himself and to realize that he/she is a unique human being (Anderson & Okoro, 2000: 23-24; Geldard & Geldard, 2002: 27; Gillis, 1994: 79; Stewart et al, 1996: 182; Van Niekerk, Van Eeden & Botha, 2001: 73).

Having high self-esteem means that an individual likes himself or herself (Baron & Byrne, 2003: 171). According to Geldard and Geldard (2002: 27-28) children with high self-esteem tend to have the following characteristics:

- They have a greater capacity to be creative.
- They are more likely to assume active roles in social groups.
- They are less likely to be burdened by self-doubt, fear and ambivalence.
- They are more likely to move more directly and realistically towards personal goals.
- They find it easier to accept differences between their own levels of competence and that of others in areas such as peer relationships and physical pursuits. They are able to accept these differences and still feel positive about themselves.

Children with poor self-esteem feel helpless and inferior, incapable of improving their situation. They strive for social approval by behaving in ways which are over-compliant, or by pretending to be self-confident when they are not. They are struggling to feel good about themselves. The most notable feature of young people suffering from low self-concept and poor self-esteem is their fear of not being good enough to perform competently. This influences almost every aspect of their behavior, and being motivated to avoid failure rather than seek successes. They are also easily discouraged in whatever they do. If this situation is allowed to remain unchecked it becomes extremely difficult to reverse and may lead to severe emotional problems in later life (Geldard & Geldard, 2002: 210; Gillis, 1994: 80; Thompson & Rudolph, 2000: 153).

According to Thompson and Rudolph (2000: 152-153) self esteem is a by-product of achievements and relationships and can be increased by helping people improve their self-concept. Interventions to directly enhance self-esteem usually involve the use of praise and performance feedback. However, although useful Geldard and Geldard (2002: 210) are of the opinion that direct intervention is not always the most effective way to bring about improvement in self-esteem. For most children working in groups provides the best opportunity for self-esteem improvement. These young people can realistically and positively evaluate themselves through the process of group interaction. Specific areas of skill development can easily be targeted through exercises and activities.

Gillis (1994: 80) suggested the following strategies in helping young people enhance their self-concept:

- Establish a caring, personal relationship, and create an environment of acceptance and optimism. Young people need to feel that they are considered sufficiently worthwhile to merit special attention, genuine respect and appreciation.
- Use every opportunity to accentuate the positive. The objective is to boost the person's morale by focusing on existing strengths, rather than to work on improving present inadequacies.
- Provide numerous opportunities for success, setting goals which are relatively easily attainable. At the end of the day discuss, and possibly record, details of all successes attained.
- Reward any attempt of positive achievement with generous approval. However, young people because are suffering from low self-esteem and are so uncertain of themselves, it is essential they perceive the approval as genuine appreciation for attaining their objectives, rather than simply encouragement or reassurance.
- Encourage them to change negative self-thinking attitudes such as 'I can't' or 'I'm not capable' to 'I can' and 'I am capable'.
- Use modelling, role-play and assertiveness training to reinforce feelings of confidence in their ability to achieve.
- Teach problem-solving skills.
- As helping others is morale-building they need to be encouraged to assist others even if they are of a younger age group in some activity.
- Avoid criticism. People with poor self-esteem are especially vulnerable to criticism.

Thompson and Rudolph (2000: 153) further note that people with low esteem need to be encouraged to view themselves as special and unique and because they are special they have a responsibility to help and not hurt themselves. This statement is discussed to teach the concept of unconditional valuing of people simply because they are people. By helping the persons to see themselves differently, they are likely to accept responsibility of developing and leaning to improve those characteristics of themselves which they perceive as negative. According to Thompson and Rudolph (2000: 155) the process of integrating self-concept with life skill development is most effective if it becomes the focus and foundation of education.

### **5.7.7 Sexuality**

Sexuality is the most difficult and sensitive topic to be conveyed to children. Anderson and Okoro (2000: 25) mention that sexual maturation and reproduction are areas, which prove to be extremely difficult, and in many instances, sensitive to teach. Adults usually feel embarrassed or uncomfortable talking about sex and sexuality to young ones. Although there are those who can easily talk about these important issues because of the relationship that they have with their children, they do not go into in depth with this topic. Scatter (1987) as mentioned by Tsatsi (2001: 77) defines sex education as “the full training of boys and girls to enable them to meet and solve the problems that arise in connection with the instinct of procreation”. It includes the necessary instruction in the facts of life, but goes far beyond that. Good sex education includes, the teaching of religious and moral principles, safeguarding the physical and emotional well-being of individuals. In addition Geldard and Geldard (2002: 226) emphasize that children need to be taught and empowered about appropriate sexual boundaries as well as to report instances of inappropriate behavior.

According to Tsatsi (2001: 77) the fact that there is an increase in pathologies such as HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy etc. is an indication that many young people have not received proper life skills during the socialization process. Most parents do not spend quality time with their children or they do not involve themselves in their

children's activities. Children end up engaging in unpleasant acts behind their parent's backs. A great amount of thought is necessary to decide what and to which level of learners' information on sexuality should be departed. Because of the prevalence of HIV/AIDS the general opinion is that sex education should start as early as possible in a child's life.

However, the general objective of this section as highlighted by Anderson and Okoro (2000: 25) is to provide information that will enable young people to understand sexuality and to gain control over their sexual functioning. Attention should be given to sexual maturation and reproduction, attitudes and feelings, love, sex, marriage and parenthood. The primary goal of most sex education curricula remains to prevent or reduce sex related problems with the underlying assumption that knowledge alone can change behavior. In conclusion Tsatsi (2001: 78) emphasizes that sex education as part of life skills education can serve as a powerful tool to overcome ignorance and provide correct information on sexuality. Sexuality is a major and positive dimension in human development. It is important that adolescents come to terms with their sexuality in ways which are positive (Geldard & Geldard, 1999: 40).

### **5.7.8 Decision-making**

Life itself consists of a multitude of decisions that people are expected to make in their daily lives. Inability to make decisions results in stress and coping problems for a client system. Healthy personal functioning depends to a large extent on the ability of people to make good decisions. Decisions also have an important influence of the quality of life of human beings. Included in the process of decision making is these amongst others individualism and the capability of taking independent decisions; taking responsible decisions; peer pressure in decision-taking; goal setting; productive and creative problem-solving abilities (Anderson & Okoro, 2000: 26; Johnson & Johnson, 2003: 275; Potgieter, 2004: 218).

As adolescents are moving from a stage of being dependent on their parents and family to being independent, they are required to make many decisions for themselves. For many adults, making decisions can be difficult. However, when compared with adults, making decisions is even more difficult for most adolescents (Geldard & Geldard, 1999: 177). This is because they do not have a body of experience from past decisions on which to base their current judgments. Additionally, they often do not have information about the options available to them or the likely consequence of these options. Sometimes, even though cognitively they will understand the consequences of particular actions because they have not personally experienced such consequences they may underestimate their importance or severity. Alternatively, they may exaggerate their importance and be afraid to choose alternatives because they believe that the associated consequences will be too severe for them. Therefore, adolescents need skills to make decisions that will foster growth and independence (Doyle, 1992: 80-81; Geldard & Geldard 1999: 177; Potgieter, 2004: 218).

Learning to make decisions is an important task of adolescence. It enables adolescents to make good decisions that will help them to establish their identity and independence. Furthermore, it helps them to deal constructively with decisions about their lives. These children become autonomous and are able to resist negative influences around them (Doyle, 1992: 79-80; Couch, Felstehausen & Patsy, 1997: 25; Tsatsi, 2001: 39). In addition Brack (2000: 49) states that of specific importance is to show learners how they can calm down and reorganize themselves when they are under stress such as negative pressure; to help themselves to develop an understanding of the social situation, feeling and perspectives of other people; to help themselves to elaborate and clarify personally meaningful and pro-social goals and to help them to plan strategies to reach their goals. In helping adolescents to make decisions, decision-making skills are vital and these will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

### **5.7.9 Stress**

Stress is known as one of the killer diseases of modern life. Long-term, unrelieved stress has been shown to lead to major illness, apathy and fatigue. Swart (2000: 383) defines stress “as strain a person experiences from the pressure of outside forces and which results in physical, psychological and/or behavioral responses to adjust to these pressures.” It is normal for people to encounter challenging situations or taxing and potentially stressful conditions.

As adolescents progress on their journey of self-discovery, they continually have to adjust to new experiences, encounters and situations. This is both stressful and anxiety provoking for them. Any change in life, whether perceived as positive or negative may also cause stress. Adolescents often experience stressors associated with pubertal changes, demands for and engagement in sexual activity, and fears of early unwanted pregnancy. The other cause of stress is pressure. Family and family conflicts are among the most prevalent of the adolescent stressors. Adolescents are often pressured to succeed and are expected to perform, frequently up to others. These can lead to a range of behaviors that cause problems for adolescents such as dependence on drugs or alcohol in order to cope with the pressure. Young people need assistance to deal with stress and to enable them to make decisions to protect themselves in the future (Amanat & Beck, 1994: 260; Bezuidenhout, 2004: 68; Corey & Corey, 2002: 307; Doyle, 1992: 21; Geldard & Geldard, 1999: 8, 202).

Stress management is especially suitable because adolescents can identify the causes of stress, discover that they are not unique in their struggles, and learn how to cope with stress. There are various strategies of coping with stress and this will be discussed later in this chapter.



### **5.7.10 Peace education and conflict resolution**

Peace education and conflict resolution are imperative in skills learning in order for people to realize the value and importance of democratic co-operation and tolerance. Furthermore, peace education and conflict resolution also concentrate on the creation of appropriate attitude and actions to counteract the effects of violence. An effective application of these strategies prevents further violence and allows a room for negotiations to be initiated. Good communication is an essential part of resolving any conflict (Anderson & Okoro, 2000: 26; Anstey, 2002: 283-284; Couch, Felstehausen & Patsy, 1997: 149). Conflict resolution as a skill will be discussed later in this chapter.

### **5.7.11 Environmental awareness and care**

The focus of this area of knowledge is to teach and encourage young people to fully utilize and protect as well take an active interest in their natural surroundings. The specific objectives according to Anderson and Okoro (2000: 26) are to teach young people to manage the natural resources wisely; to actively oppose pollution; to guard and save the water supply; to care for the earth and all living things; and ways and means to cycle waste products.

From the above discussion of learning areas, we learn that there are effective life skills required by adolescents. For the purpose of getting a general overview of life skills the next section focuses on classification of life skills as presented by Brack and Hill (2000: 11-12). This will be followed by a review of life skills related to adolescent development.

## **5.8 CLASSIFICATION OF LIFE SKILLS**

The American School Counseling Associations (ASCA) as mentioned by Brack and Hill (2000: 11-12) classifies life skills into three major groups:

- a. Learning to belong as a life long learner (academic life skills);
- b. Learning to belong as a life long worker (career life skills); and
- c. Learning to be safe and to survive (personal/social life skills)

By closely combining the WHO and the ASCA documents, Brack and Hill (2000: 11-12) came up with a holistic means of teaching people to approach life’s challenges. An integration of WHO and ASCA life skills is shown in figure 1:

Life Skills

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LEARN TO LEARN	LEARN TO WORK	LEARN TO LIVE
Academic life skills	Career life skills	Personal/social life skills
Decision-making	Decision making	Decision-making
Problem solving	Problem solving	Problem solving
		Creative thinking
Critical thinking	Critical thinking	Critical thinking
Effective communication	Effective communication	Effective communication
	Interpersonal Relationship	Interpersonal Relationship
Self-awareness	Self awareness	Self awareness
Coping with emotions	Coping with emotions	Coping with emotions
Coping with stress	Coping with stress	Coping with stress

**Figure 1: Classification of life skills**

(Adapted from Brack & Hill, 2000: 11-12).

Furthermore, ASCA in Brack and Hill (2000: 17-18) outlined the targets goals for each domain as follows:

A. **Learning to Learn** Target goals

- Participants will acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that contribute to effective learning in school and across the life span;
- Participants will complete school with the academic preparation essential to choose from a wide range of substantial postsecondary options, including college;
- Participants will understand the relationship of academics to the world of work, and to life at home and in the community.

B. **Learning to Work** Target goals

- Participants will acquire the skills to investigate the world of work in relation to knowledge of self and to make informed career decisions;
- Participants will employ strategies to achieve future career success and satisfaction;
- Participants will understand the relationship among personal qualities, education and training and world of work.

C. **Learning to Live** Target goals

- Participants will acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others;
- Participants will make decisions, set goals, and take necessary action to achieve goals.
- Participants will understand safety and survival skills.

Adapted from Brack and Hill “2000: 17-18).

Following is a discussion of life skills considered that are essential and vital in adolescents’ development. Each life skill contains knowledge concerning what are the correct choices to make.

## **5.9 EFFECTIVE LIFE SKILLS**

According to Johnson and Johnson (2003: 534) people experience problems because they lack skills or are unable to utilize them effectively. However, people can learn skills to live more effectively and attain their potential (Hill & O'Brien, 1999: 6). Often, these skills can alleviate the powerlessness that individuals feel when they are unable to communicate their emotions directly and can assist them in engaging more fully in their lives. WHO (1997: 2) mentions that the life skills are often taken for granted, however, there is a growing recognition that with changes in many culture and lifestyles, many young people are not sufficiently equipped with life skills to help them deal with the increasing demands and stresses they experience. According to Corey and Corey (2002: 300), Hill and O'Brien (1999: 6) as well as Stewart, De Kock, Smit, Sproat and Storrie (1996: 167) life skills such as skills in communication, decision-making, problem-solving etc. help people to acquire necessary tools to take charge of and effectively manage their lives.

In the context of this study the focus will be on the following life skills namely: communication skills, interpersonal relationship skills, assertiveness skills, problem solving skills, decision-making skills, conflict resolution skills, critical thinking skills, creative thinking skills, self-awareness, empathy, coping with emotions and coping with stress.

### **5.9.1 Communication**

According to Hoelson and Van Schalkwyk (2001: 261) communication is a cluster of skills that forms the foundation of all other life skills. Without effective communication skills, the development of life skills and life itself is unsustainable. Every system depends upon communication for its survival (Cleary, 2004: 7).

Communication is the basis for all human interaction. Effective communication is essential for good relationships. Although it is impossible not to communicate, since all behavior is communication, basic communication skills are often not so easily acquired. Communication is effective when the idea or message, as it was initiated and intended by the sender, corresponds closely with the message as it is perceived and responded to by the sender. Children frequently suffer emotional problems because they have poor communication skills and are unable to express their feelings or talk about their needs and worries. Young people who have poor communication skills are unlikely to have the ability to stand up for themselves and to assert their rights. In situations involving peers or adults, this lack of communication skills can result in feelings of helplessness and powerlessness. Learning to communicate effectively helps adolescents to build positive relationships with others and it also increases their self-esteem (Cleary, 2004: 7; Couch, Felstehausen & Patsy, 1997: 95; Geldard & Geldard, 2002: 228; Johnson & Johnson, 2003: 137; Potgieter, 2004: 228).

Communication is the process of creating meaning between two or more people through the expression and interpretation of messages. It occurs when people send a message to one or more receivers with the conscious intent of affecting the receivers' behavior. Basically the communication process comprises the transmitter of a message, the message itself and the receiver thereof. The communication process occurs when only all these elements are present. Good communication occurs when two or more people focus their attention on the same issue at the same time and understand the meaning of the expressed comments. This type of communication generates understanding, spreads information and is the means for achieving problem solving (Anstey, 2002: 179; Cleary, 2004: 2; Doyle, 1992: 31; Hoelson & Van Schalkwyk, 2001: 260).

There are basic sending and receiving skills that people need to master to communicate effectively. Sending skills include taking clear ownership for one's message, making messages complete and specific, ensuring that one's verbal and nonverbal messages are congruent, building in redundancy, obtaining feedback on how the message was received, adapting the message to the receivers' frame of reference, describing one's feelings and

describing others' behavior with evaluation. Receiving skills include paraphrasing accurately and evaluating the content to the message and the senders' feelings, describing one's perception of the sender's feelings and negotiating meaning of the message until receiver and sender agree. Effective communication requires effective speaking and effective listening. Furthermore, effective communication exists when the receiver interprets the sender's message in the same way that sender intended it. It is the responsibility of helpers to train clients in how to send and receive communication (Anstey, 2002: 180; Doyle, 1992: 31; Johnson & Johnson, 2003: 172 & 138; Nelson-Jones, 1995: 344).

Communication is much more than just the exchange of words. It is a process by which people convey meanings to each other by using symbols. All behavior conveys some message and is, therefore, a form of communication. Communication involves the exchange of ideas and perspectives, values, beliefs, needs, assumptions, cultural, spiritual and family backgrounds, as well as past and present thoughts, feelings and behavior of both speaker and audience. Furthermore, communication involves expressing thoughts in ways that are appropriate to peoples' cultures and situations (Anstey, 2002: 179; Brack & Hill, 2000:10; Johnson & Johnson, 2003: 137; Long 1996: 78; Potgieter, 2004: 79; Toseland & Rivas, 2005: 65).

Communication is characterized by a complex combination of verbal signals and nonverbal signals. Verbal communication is communication using words whereas non-verbal communication is communication without words. People often communicate by a willingness to listen more by what they do than what they say. Non-verbal communication is an important part of all messages, involving all senses, and is also the foundation on which human relationships are built. This form of communication comes in the tone of one's voice, the speed at which ones speaks, the pauses, shouting, whispering and other vocal expressions. It also includes facial expressions, hand gestures, foot movements and body position. People who are good communicators are able to express opinions and desires, but also needs and fears. Their faces are truly their windows on the world and their expressions the most important things they are wearing.

Non-verbal behavior is relatively irrepressible, difficult to control so that even when people try to conceal their inner feelings from others, these often leak out in many ways through nonverbal cues. The non-verbal aspect of a message thus always carries more weight than the verbal component (Anstey, 2002: 179-180; Baron & Byrne, 2003: 39; Clearly, 2004: 24; France, 1996: 32; Long, 1996: 172; Myrick, 1997: 131; Potgieter, 2004: 83).

Communication skills have been shown by researchers to be effective in developing helping relationships and assisting people in improving their lives. These skills can be improved through training and practice. The ability to communicate is vital since it facilitates the change processes (Hill & O'Brien, 1999: 4; Potgieter, 2004: 78).

### **5.9.2 Interpersonal relationship skills**

According to Hoelson and Van Scalkwyk (2001: 263) interpersonal skills involve a cluster of skills necessary for establishing, maintaining and ending relationships, and are closely interconnected with communication skills. They are regarded as one of the major keys to decreasing self-defeating behavior and increasing self-enhancing behavior (Brack & Hill, 2000: 10).

The interactional difficulties which people commonly experience such as lack of openness, struggles of power, vagueness and accusations are associated with lack of interpersonal skills. Interpersonal skills help people to relate in positive ways with the people they interact with. The most important characteristic of interpersonal communication is that the participants continually provide feedback or response to each other's messages. Conversing with a family member or discussing a movie with friends are examples of interpersonal communication. This may mean being able to make and keep friendly relationships, which can be of great importance to a persons' mental and social well-being. It may also mean keeping good relations with family members, which are an important sorcery of social support. A person is able to end relationships constructively if well trained. In this training, helpers identify and train clients in how to

interact socially and affectionately. Clients are taught the importance of showing concern, positive reinforcement as well as give and take (Brack & Hill, 2000: 10; Johnson & Johnson, 2003: 534; Nelson-Jones, 1995: 344; Potgieter, 2004: 228; Steinberg, 2003: 21).

According to Doyle (1992: 179) communication support is an important relationship skill. The attitude and effective use of attending and clarifying responses demonstrate support by showing a real interest in someone. This skill involves actively providing positive feedback; communicating feelings of security; reassurance; and reaffirming the one's sense of self. Supportive and reassuring responses stress faith and believe in others; believe the other person's ability to resolve issues; have an understanding of the frailty of human condition; and respect the dignity and worth of every individual.

### **5.9.3 Assertiveness skills**

Steinberg (2003: 90) notes that sometimes problems are created in relationships with friends, family or work colleagues because people lack the communication skills needed to express emotions, needs, and opinions assertively. People may choose to bury them or unleash them uncontrollably. Assertiveness training skills are utilized to assist individuals who are unduly hesitant about expressing their wants or feelings, or in standing up for their personal rights (Gillis, 1999: 41). Verderber (1990) in Steinberg (2003:90) defines assertiveness as “verbalizing your position on an issue for purposes of achieving a specific goal.” The specific goal is for the person to express himself in such a way that he hurt neither himself nor others. Assertiveness involves the ability to express feelings and opinions openly and honestly without offending others. Assertiveness training aims at teaching clients to stand up for their rights (Anderson & Okoro, 2000: 24; Couch, Felstehausen & Hallman, 1997: 5; Geldard & Geldard, 1999: 173; Hill & O' Brien, 1999: 273, Zastrow, 2000: 477).

Assertive individuals are those who act in their own best interests without too much anxiety and without infringing on the rights of others. Assertive people are aware of their



rights; communicate their opinions, needs, and feelings in appropriate ways; and make reasonable demands on others. Being assertive involves listening to the other person, validating what the other person has said, believing in your right to present a point of view and being prepared to express a point of view. Unassertive individuals on the other hand allow themselves to be treated as persons of little or no consequence (Doyle, 1992: 139; Geldard & Geldard, 1999: 173).

Steinberg (2003: 92) notes that training people to improve assertive behavior is not easy however, it is certainly worth. Assertion training is concerned with the building of self-confidence and esteem, and the ability to translate this into improving communications and relationships. Doyle (1992: 139-140) also emphasizes that learning to be assertive is hard work and has suggested the following steps in helping people to be assertive:

- Help the client to recognize that his or her inhibitions are causing a great deal of tension and unpleasantness. The client must be able to overcome these inhibitions.
- Obtain all detailed descriptions of all the situations that are related to unassertive behavior, identify specific instances of unassertiveness and causes.
- Help the client arrange a hierarchy, from the situations where the clients has a higher probability of being assertive to those where the client is unassertive.
- Teach the client the distinction between assertiveness and aggression.
- Develop a plan to teach the client more assertive behavior.
- Implement the plan. The helper needs to be systematic and provide positive feedback and reinforcement.
- Encourage the client to evaluate his or her own behavior and any changes that have taken place. Plan to follow up with the client.

In addition Nelson-Jones (1995: 344) identifies four specific assertive response patterns or abilities that helpers can train client as: saying 'no'; asking for favors and making requests; expressing positive and negative feelings; and initiating, continuing and terminating conversations. Assertiveness training is designed to help people realize, feel and act on the assumption that they have the right to be themselves and express their feelings freely. Once assertiveness skills have been acquired it should significantly increase the learners' self-esteem and self-efficacy and decrease loneliness, social awkwardness and social phobia (Couch, Felstehausen & Hallman, 1997: 5; Zastrow, 2000: 477-478).

#### **5.9.4 Problem-solving skills**

A problem is any unsatisfactory or undesirable condition that needs to be corrected. All people experience problems. Some need immediate action; others need careful thought and time before they can be resolved. Without adequate information, people tend to go for quick solutions that aggravate the condition since it addressed the symptoms rather the real issue. Some people may attempt to rationalize their problems away or to ignore them in the hope that they will disappear. Many of the conditions that people encounter are the result of inadequate problem solving capacities. It is therefore of utmost importance that people should be taught problem solving skills (Hepworth & Larsen, 1993: 446; Myrick, 1997: 161; Potgieter, 2004: 220-222; Swart, 2000: 356).

It is natural for young people to turn to adults at times, for guidance when faced with challenges. Gillis (1999: 47) notes that whilst the opinions given may be instrumental in helping them to resolve a specific issue, the young person's long-term interests may be better served if the opportunity is used to a systematic approach to problem solving. The art of problem solving need not be the exclusive domain of counselors. Young people can be trained in problem-solving skills as part of their growing process and be assisted in applying those skills in their personal lives (Anderson & Okoro, 2000: 9; Brack & Hill, 2000: 11; Myrick, 1997: 161).

Problem-solving skills enable people to deal constructively with problems in their lives. Significant problems that are left unresolved can cause mental stress and give rise to accompanying physical strain. Problem solving is described as a step-by-step method of dealing with problems by following a formal reasoning process. In this process, problems are identified and a series of decisions are made to improve the situation. The counselor provides the necessary guidelines during the learning process. The youngster experiences his problems clearer and is expected to play the decisive role in resolving them. Furthermore, it is noted that an essential pre-requisite in helping is the youngster's total commitment and involvement in the process is that the person must acknowledge that there is problem and should be genuinely motivated to resolve it (Brack & Hill, 2000: 9; Gillis, 1999: 47; Swart, 2000: 356).

A review of professional literature suggests that problem solving involves the following several steps:

- Identifying the problem and establishing goals. Counseling skills are used identify and clarify the problem and determine goals.
- Generating alternative solutions. The youngster is encouraged to brainstorm every possible means of achieving the goals.
- Choosing the best alternative.
- Developing a plan.
- Implementation; The youngster acting upon the plan.
- Follow up to evaluate how the solution(s) worked.

(Anstey, 2002: 135; France, 1996: 60; Gillis, 1999: 47-48; Hepworth & Larsen, 1993: 446; Myrick, 1997: 161-163; Potgieter, 2004: 222-224; Swart, 2000: 360-362; Zastrow, 2000: 48-49).

According to Myrick (1997: 161) problem-solving can be a difficult task as the presenting problem may not be the real problem. The presenting problem may only be a symptom or a manifestation of the source of the problem. Later, other related problems or

behaviors may emerge during the process of problem solving. Therefore problem solving can be tedious work. It is not easy to know where to begin. However, by training and by job description a helper is considered a resource to be drawn upon. The young person is coached through a thinking process, where it is possible to put the problem in perspective and to arrive at some action which can be taken. The process of solving the problem rests with the individual. Mastering the process requires persistence and determination and the willingness to repeat and practice until mastery is achieved. Part of the learning process should include preparing the client system for possible failure (Potgieter, 2004: 223-224; Myrick, 1997: 161).

According to Potgieter (2004: 224) knowledge of the problem-solving skill does not guarantee a life free from problems, but it offers people the chance to face life concerns directly and openly while it also alleviates many negative consequences.

### **5.9.5 Decision-making skills**

Decision-making is an extension of the problem-solving process. According to Gillis (1999: 48) the procedure is similar; expect that it provides a structural basis for making choices, rather than for finding solutions. The ability to make good decisions helps to prevent problem conditions. Making good decisions involves choosing between two or more options. The need for effective decision-making is an ongoing process throughout the life span of an individual and it is also something that everyone must do every day. If this skill is not sufficiently acquired during the normal developmental process, special efforts should be made to rectify the situation (Doyle, 1992: 79-80; Potgieter, 2004: 219; Swart, 2000: 356).

Geldard and Geldard (1999: 178) note that adolescent decision-making processes are often influenced by pressure from peer groups to conform; they may also be influenced by beliefs about other people's motives, abilities and characteristics. They are likely to make decisions impulsively and /or defensively in response to situational demands without carefully following a properly thought out decision-making process. Helpers

need to help them to use their own resources for arriving at decisions. They need to be encouraged to make the best possible choices taking account of their personal values and the objectives they wish to achieve (Janis & Mann, 1982 as quoted by Geldard & Geldard, 1999: 178).

Values and attitudes play a vital role in the process of decision-making (Tsatsi, 2001: 39). The presence of values removes the association that there are right or wrong answers or outcomes. Learning decision-making skills increases the possibility of an individual attaining what he or she values. Young people are made aware that every decision made has consequences, and they must accept the responsibility for the consequences of the decisions made. Being made aware that they should at times be capable of taking their own decisions affecting their own lives will boost their self confidence and assure them that they have the right to exert some control over their lives.

The decision-making process involves a systematically working through a series of steps. In helping adolescents to make decisions it can be useful for a helper to identify for them the following stages of decision making: define the problem, examine the possible choices and the consequences of each choice, select the best choice, act on your decision and evaluate your decision. The role of the helper is not one of making decisions for the client systems, but to give them the skills to deal with the present concern, and also to deal effectively with future problems (Couch, Felstehausen & Patsy 1997: 27; Doyle, 1992: 80; Geldard & Geldard, 1999: 178; Potgieter, 2004: 220; Swart, 2000: 358-362).

Basically the main trust of all helping interventions is to assist client to make better choices. The helper needs to help clients develop rational decision-making skills. A critical aspect of effective decision-making is the ability to view the decisions from various points of view. Poor decisions are often made because people do not think of proper alternatives or do a poor job of evaluation. For most important decisions, all of the above mentioned stages would be required. If any of them are missed out, then it may be that decisions will be reached that cannot be maintained. Learning the decision-making process helps individuals anticipate problems, minimize the probability of acting

impulsively, and lessens the anxiety and tension often associated with crises and indecisiveness. Therefore, mastering decision making skills enables young people achieve a sense of control over their lives by making sound and responsible choices (Doyle, 1992: 83; Johnson & Johnson, 2003: 299; Nelson-Jones, 1994: 274; Potgieter, 2004: 224).

### **5.9.6 Conflict-resolution skills**

According to Potgieter (2004: 233) conflict is part of life of all systems. It is both natural and inevitable in interpersonal relationships. The closer the ties between people, and the more frequent their contact, the greater the chances of getting irritable and annoyed with one another. Conflict is defined as a struggle between two or more people over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate reviles (Anstey, 2002: 5). Conflict exists in a relationship when parties believe that their aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously, or perceives a divergence in their values, needs and interests. Members of a system cannot come to an agreement about the events, rules, goals, behaviors, task performances or the decision making that affect their lives together. Therefore, they employ their power in an effort to defeat change each other to protect or further their interests in the interaction. However, because there is conflict, it does not necessarily mean that the relationship is doomed. Positively managed conflict can produce remarkably positive results (Anstey, 2002: 6; Clearly, 2004: 51; Potgieter, 2004: 233; Swart; 2000: 367).

Conflict can be constructive or destructive. Constructive conflict is productive in the sense that it triggers creativity, innovation and stimulates trusts and understanding. It brings problems, differences of opinion and competing needs out into the open. This conflict has the potential to energize the problem-solving capacities of people, to stimulate constructive forms of interaction and to promote growth. Destructive conflict involves efforts to destroy each other and includes behaviors such as belittling, degrading, verbal abuse or physical violence. The consequence of this type of conflict is

often negative with the different parties involved in attacks and effort to destroy each other. It is not the presence of conflicts, but the way in which they are managed, that determines whether they are destructive or constructive (Anstey, 1993: 17; Anstey, 2002: 10; Cleary, 2004: 51-52; Corey & Corey, 2002: 179-180; Johnson & Johnson, 2003: 382; Swart, 2000: 368).

Conflict normally results from situations where parties seek maximum personal gain and there is lack of rules to resolve the issue. The sources of conflict are multiple and complex and they include: styles of decision-making and problem-solving techniques, faulty communication, struggle for power, personality clashes, competition for limited resources, poor task performance, changes in roles, status and leadership, changing norms and expectations etc. Some people have difficulty dealing with conflict. They avoid, ignore, or minimize it, hoping it will go away. These strategies are said to be counterproductive. Avoiding conflict rarely leads to satisfying and meaningful dialogue. When conflicts are avoided, true feelings and opinions are not expressed. When unresolved problems from the past are brought up, negative feelings escalate; fueling anger and despair, which often detract from the motivation and possibility of resolution. Before conflict can be dealt with and constructively worked through, it must first be recognized (Anstey, 2002: 13; Baron & Byrne, 2003: 496; Corey, 2004: 98; Cumming & Davies, 1994: 16; Potgieter, 2004: 233-234; Swart, 2000: 369-371; Toseland & Rivas, 2001: 340).

According to Potgieter (2004: 236-237) the following strategies can be used to manage conflict:

- Mutual respect. Understanding and respect for each other's point of view is a basic requirement during conflict resolution.

- Ability to pinpoint “the issue”. People should develop the ability to identify an issue behind an event or a complaint.
- Focusing on facts in the present. This requires the ability to distinguish between facts and emotions and to concentrate on what is relevant in the situation.
- Conflict resolution needs the co-operation of both parties.
- Strive for a collaborative two-winner approach. Losing creates bitterness and triggers feelings of revenge. A two-winner approach requires the ability to understand the viewpoint of the other.
- Address the issue in small steps. Arguments and conflicts are less likely to become overheated if issues are addressed once at a time.
- Mastering the ability to make request. Many conflicts are the result of the inability of parties to openly express their needs in clear and direct requests.

When conflicts are managed constructively, they have many desirable outcomes. People discover that their relationships are strong enough to withstand an honest level of challenge. Constructive conflict can help people understand each other and can keep the relationship clear of irritations and resentments. Conflict management skills are vital in sustaining healthy relationships (Johnson & Johnson, 2003: 380-382).

### **5.9.7 Critical thinking skills**

According to Nelson-Jones (1994: 248) thinking skills can help people to think before they act. Critical thinking skills are described as the ability to analyze information and experiences in an objective manner (Brack & Hill, 2000: 10). Critical thinking can contribute to health by helping people to recognize and assess the factors that influence attitudes and behavior, such as values, peer pressure, and media. Many authors agree that



young people need to develop the ability to think logically and to use their capacity for logical thinking to make judgments and decisions for themselves (Gladding, 1997: 10-108; Gillis, 1994: 72-75; Geldard & Geldard, 1999: 6). People with critical thinking skills are able to recognize and define problems, gather information, form tentative conclusions and evaluate these to make decisions. Of particular importance is to teach adolescents to improve their capacity for critical thinking. Following is a brief description of thinking skills areas as outlined by Nelson-Jones (1995: 361-362).

- Owing responsibility for choosing. People should be aware that they are the author of existence and can choose how to think, act and feel.
- Using coping self-talk. Instead of talking to themselves negatively before, during and after specific situation, people can make self-statements that can calm them down and coach them in how to cope.
- Choosing realistic personal rules.
- Choosing to perceive accurately. Being able to distinguish between fact and inference and make inferences as accurate as possible.
- Explaining cause accurately. Develop the skills of explaining the causes of events accurately.
- Predict realistically. Be realistic about the risks and rewards for future actions. Assess threats and dangers accurately.
- Setting realistic goals. Short and long term goals should reflect values, be realistic, specific and have a time frame.
- Using visualizing skills. People think in pictorial images as well as in words.

- Realistic decision-making. Confront rather than avoid decisions.
- Prevent and managing problems. Anticipate and confront problems. Assess the thinking and action you require to deal with issues.

According to Brack and Hill (2000: 9-10) the implementation of thinking skills should be followed by creative thinking skills.

### **5.9.8 Creative thinking skills**

Creative thinking involves divergent thinking, flexibility, originality, the consideration of remote possibilities and the ability to consider a variety of solution to the same problem (Geldard & Geldard, 1999: 6). The ability to be spontaneously creative, approaching situation with fresh ideas is important to adolescents. According to Brack and Hill (2000: 9-10) creative thinking contributes to both decision-making and problem-solving by enabling people to explore the available alternatives and various consequences of their actions or non-actions. It helps people to look beyond their direct experience, and even if no problem is identified, or no decision is to be made. Creative thinking helps people to respond adaptively and with flexibility to the situations of their daily lives.

### **5.9.9 Self-awareness skills**

Stewart et al (1996: 169) mention that many people lack proper self-knowledge. They do not know where they are in their lives, what their long-term goals are or how they intend achieving goals based on their potential abilities. According to Corey and Corey (2002: 308) between the ages of 10 and 14, young people are prone to denial and externalization; are self conscious, and may not show great interest in the process of self-awareness. They may have a confused, distorted knowledge of themselves and need help to overcome this confusion and distortion. They may need assistance in learning to become more aware of themselves (Doyle, 1992: 112).

Self-awareness includes peoples' recognition of themselves, their character, identity, cultural perspectives, goals, motivations, needs, values, feelings, strengths and weaknesses as well as desires and dislikes. Developing self-awareness helps people to recognize when they are stressed or feel under pressure. Furthermore, it is viewed as a prerequisite for effective communication and interpersonal relations, as well as for developing empathy for others. The more one is in touch with one's own feelings, attitudes and behavior, the greater the chance the level of communication. The individual who has self-awareness is aware of the realities of life and feel responsible for self, others, and the well-being of society (Brack & Hill, 2000: 10; Corey & Corey, 2002: 32; Doyle, 1992: 113).

Self-awareness also implies knowledge of past experiences. According to Stewart et al (1996: 170) before people can properly know themselves as they are today, they need to look at their past. The way people see themselves today is certainly the result of past experiences and influences. However, these influences should be viewed as external events and cannot be seen as a focus point. A person's strengths rest on an internal foundation and people should focus on them to enhance their potential. The past should be viewed as a learning experience. By looking at the past events, enables people to focus on their weakness and recognize strengths in themselves. The main important point is that people should reinforce (build) those strengths that make them feel good about life. Whenever people feel despondent about themselves, they should recall their strengths hence their ego will be boosted (Stewart et al, 1996: 170).

According to Stewart et al (1996: 173) self-awareness also implies that people should consider their personal expectations about their future actions. Human potential is regarded as limitless. Therefore, it is important that people should become aware of their unlimited potential and the future opportunities open to them.

### 5.9.10 Empathy

Corey and Corey (2002: 135) define empathy as the ability to tune in to what others are subjectively experiencing and to see their world through their eyes. It is the ability to imagine what life is like for another person, even in a situation that you may not be familiar with. Empathy helps in understanding and accepting others who may be very different, which can improve social interactions. By understanding the feelings of others such as the need for love and acceptance, hurt of past experiences, loneliness, joy and enthusiasms people make, it becomes possible for others to open up. When people experience this understanding without critical judgment, they are most likely to reveal their real concerns. However, understanding others perspectives alone is not sufficient, one must be able to express verbally a sense of understanding and attempt to do something to relieve ones pain. Thus empathy means not only “I feel your pain,” but also, “I understand your pain” (Baron & Byrne, 2003: 408; Clearly, 2004: 82; Corey, 2004: 110; Corey & Corey, 2002: 135).

Empathy is an avenue of demonstrating support. The core of the skill of empathy lies in being able to openly grasp another’s experiencing and at the same time to maintain one’s separateness. It requires the capacity to feel an emotion deeply but to remain separate enough not to get sucked into or overwhelmed by such emotion (Brack & Hill, 2000: 10; Corey & Corey, 2002: 135, 36; Hackney & Cormier, 1994: 14-15; Potgieter, 2004: 103).

Empathy can also help to encourage nurturing behaviors toward people in need of care and assistance, or tolerance, as is the case with people living with HIV/AIDS, or people with mental disorder, who may be stigmatized and ostracized by the very people they depend upon for support. Empathy is associated with other positive characteristics such as a sense of well-being, achievement motivation, sociability and a positive emotional state. To be effective and empathic, stepping into the shoes of the other must lead to understanding. Workshops and skills development are regarded as important means of enhancing knowledge of making use of empathic understanding (Baron and Byrne, 2003: 412; Brack & Hill, 2000: 10; Potgieter, 2004: 103).

### **5.9.11 Coping with emotions**

Emotions are part of human nature. According to Baron and Byrne (2003: 541) coping refers to the way in which people deal with threats and with their emotional consequences. Of special interest is the effect of emotions on health. Coping with emotions involves recognizing your emotions and others emotions, being aware of how emotions influence behavior, and being able to respond to emotions appropriately. Intense emotions, like anger or sorrow can have negative effects on a persons' health if a person does not react appropriately (Brack & Hill, 2000: 10).

### **5.9.12 Coping with stress/Stress management**

Coping with stress is about recognizing the sources of stress, recognizing how these affect a person, and acting in ways that help to reduce levels of stress. This may mean that people have to take action to reduce the sources of stress, for example by making changes to their physical environment or lifestyles. The active efforts taken to solve or ameliorate stressful conditions people experience and lower their anxiety are what is called coping strategies. Basically there are two responses to stress shared by adolescents: fight or flight. However, the best way to reduce stress is to know as much as possible about the conditions that cause stress. Knowledge provides a sense of control, rather than ignorance and the unpredictability (Amanat & Beck, 1994: 258; Baron & Byrne, 2003: 542; Doyle, 1992: 22; WHO, 1997: 2).

Stress can be managed effectively by individuals. Some of the ways that are used to cope with stress are proactive or constructive whereas others are more reactive and nonconstructive. Nonconstructive coping skills include being aggressive, defensive, self-blaming, and being withdrawn. Although these tactics can relieve stress they ultimately have serious negative physical and emotional repercussions (Doyle, 1992: 22). Proactive or constructive coping strategies involve taking direct and effective steps to handle a

given issue, problem, or demand of life. According to Doyle (1992: 22-23) constructive strategies involve efforts to:

- Appraise the situation in realistic ways. This involves making an accurate and realistic evaluation of the situations and circumstances that cause the stressful events. Having a clear perception of a problem and the circumstances that caused it is an important coping process.
- Use appropriate problem-solving skills. Learning how to solve, modify, or circumvent the problems faced in life is a major coping process.
- Deal effectively with one's emotional reactions to stress. It is often important to reduce the emotional reactions caused by stress. This can be accomplished by learning how to release emotions in mature and socially acceptable ways.
- Maintain one's body in good physical condition. Keeping the body in reasonably good physical condition enable people to deal more effectively with the demands on them by any stressful condition. Learning to eat nutritional foods and engaging in reasonable amount of exercise are activities that can help prevent and ameliorate the problems of stress.

Baron and Byrne (2003: 548) note that the physical and psychological comfort provided by other people also is beneficial in times of stress, and it is effective regardless of the kind of strategies that are used. When people feel stressed, it helps to have family and friends who can provide an outlet for blowing steam; they give support to one lacking self-confidence, and they can be confided in about personal problems. The presence of social support helps toward healing and enables one to recover more quickly. Support groups are considered helpful especially when the problem is stigmatizing, for example AIDS and alcoholism. Employing these positive coping strategies does not automatically ensure a successful outcome in any particular situation. However since the coping process is an ongoing one that is repeated over and over again, the use of these

constructive coping skills generally leads to positive outcomes (Swart, 2000: 399; Doyle, 1992: 22; Baron & Byrne, 2003: 548).

Instilling life skills is based on an educational theoretical framework. Life skills education most often implies running structured groups of limited duration to train participants in one or more specific life skills (Nelson-Jones, 1995: 356; Nelson-Jones, 1993:227). In the next section life skills education is looked at.

## **5.10 LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION**

According to Anderson and Okoro (2000: 18) the most effective way in dealing with social and health problems is to direct primary prevention programs at young people where internalisation of healthy life-styles and a sound socially acceptable value system is still possible. This process is known as empowering children through appropriate education. Appropriate education again refers to a positive approach in which the target group is provided with knowledge and life skills to purposefully assist them to more effectively cope with daily life situations. To combat or minimize the problems people need to maintain a healthy balance between preventive, controlling and treatment measures with prevention as the predominant role. Skidmore (1994: 332) mentions that prevention is the process of action taken to minimize anti-social behavior or to see to it that it does not arise at all.

According to WHO (1994: 1) life skills are competencies and abilities for adaptive and positive behavior, that enable individuals to deal effectively with challenges of everyday life. The teaching of skills is therefore practical and intended to equip the learner with new or improved abilities. The methods to teach life skills are based on experiential learning (learning through active participation) rather than didactic teaching. Life skills acquisition requires opportunities for practice and application of skills being taught. Life skills are taught in many different health promotion and prevention education programmes. According to WHO (1994: 2) life skills education is relevant to many areas of public health concern and programmes can be designed to address the major

behaviour-related health problems for children and adolescents. Life skills education is seen as a comprehensive approach to health education and health promotion among the youth. The above-mentioned author further, outlines the areas of public concern that makes life skills education essential and these are listed below:

- Drug abuse
- Adolescent pregnancy
- AIDS
- Child abuse
- Depression
- Conflict and Crime
- Suicide

The teaching of life skills marks recognition of the need to address the socio-emotional factors that influence young peoples' behaviour. These include the effects of self-esteem, self-image, social support networks and stress. Craig et al (1996: 6) believe that life skills can be learnt modified and improved as the person develops and adjust to life's challenges.

In life skills education, children are actively involved in a dynamic teaching and learning process. Life skills education involves the learning of new skills. Methods used to facilitate the learning of skills include; skill practice, group discussion, panels, debates, brainstorming, role-playing, small group work and games. Through these and other innovative teaching techniques children can acquire skills to deal assertively with peer pressure, the use of drugs or to have unprotected sex and learn how to manage and cope with a wide range of other specific problems. Life skills education has been proved to be effective in the developed world in such areas as the prevention of substance abuse, adolescent pregnancy and prevention of bullying. There are also life skills programmes to prevent HIV/AIDS, for peace education, and for the promotion of self-confidence and self-esteem. A number of developing countries like South Africa have adopted life skills education in the national educational curricula (The Department of Education Interim



Core Syllabus for Guidance, 1995) and others have shown keen interest (WHO, 1997: 1; WHO, 1994: 2; Brack & Hill, 2000 13).

According to Gladding (1997: 101) timing as well as content is crucial when working with children. Learning should occur when the children are ready and able to learn. A life skills lesson may start with a teacher exploring with the students what their ideas or knowledge is about a particular situation in which a life skill can be used. The role of the teacher is not only to teach, but also to act as a facilitator in a dynamic and learning process. The children are given opportunities to discuss the issues raised in more detail in small groups. They may then engage in short role-play scenarios, or take part in activities that allow them to practice the skills in different situations. The actual practice of skills is very important component of life skills educations. Finally homework will be assigned to encourage the children to further discuss and practise the skills with their families. Promoting communication skills is crucial in the education role of the helper (Gladding, 1997: 101; WHO, 1997: 4).

Life skills lessons are effective when combined with health information or other programmes, which influence the health and development of young people. The method used in the teaching skills builds upon what is known of how young people learn from their own experiences and the people around them, from observing how others behave and what consequences arise from behaviour (Anderson & Okoro, 2000; WHO, 1997: 16).

Life skills education is a growing area. According to WHO (1994:2-3) as well as Brack & Hill (2000: 97) the growing popularity of life skills approaches reflects a move towards more positive and holistic approaches to preventive education. WHO (1997: 7) mentions that life skills are important for children and adolescents as it promotes their mental well-being and cooperative learning. It promotes the learning of abilities that contribute to positive health behaviour and positive interpersonal relationship. Nelson-Jones (1993: 227) outlines the following as reasons for the growth of life skill education:

- It has a developmental emphasis. The target of life skills training in the ideal world would be to train everyone in the skills required to meet each task at every stage of their life span. Such training has developmental rather than a remedial or rehabilitation emphasis.
- It has a preventive emphasis. Efforts are devoted to the personal and social education of people in such a way that their developmental needs are anticipated.
- Problems of living are widespread. People need various life skills to assist them to cope with their problems.

There are several objectives of life skills education. In the following section, these objectives are discussed in detail.

#### **5.10.1 Objectives of life skills education**

Many life skills programmes address multiple prevention and health promotion objectives. Anderson and Okoro (2000: 27) suggest the following as objectives of life skills education.

- To educate young people on how the human body works and in particular to educate them on the effect that diseases (especially HIV/AIDS), substances (drugs) and other abusing factors have on the working of the human body;
- To equip young people with the skills necessary to understand and overcome pressures which can lead them to abuse the working of their bodies;
- To equip young people with the skills to understand and overcome pressures which limit the uniqueness and potential of human beings;

- To educate young people on the relationship between human beings, animals, the environment and the universe; and
- To equip young people with the outlook, life skills and philosophy necessary to promote a feeling of harmony within themselves, with others, the environment and the universe.

In addition, the Journal of Social Psychology (1993: 528) identified the following life skills areas, which will support the restraint of social, and health problems:

- To reinforce knowledge of human sexuality, reproduction, sexual transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS;
- Equip people with basic skills such as assertiveness, negotiation, problem solving and decision making;
- Learn to identify and develop core values like honesty, respect, caring, tolerance, loyalty and commitment;
- Help to promote attitudes and behavior changes that will prevent infection; and
- Encourage young people to become involved in addressing and /or preventing problems in the community as such as substance abuse, violence and crime.

Next is the discussion of three methods of delivering life skills education. Each method focuses on the basic principles that can be applied when working with adolescents.

## **5.10.2 Methods used in life skills education**

As already noted, in life skills education children are actively involved in a dynamic teaching and learning process. The methods used to facilitate this active involvement include working in small groups, brainstorming, and role-play.

### **5.10.2.1 Group work**

According to Thompson and Rudolph (2000: 416) and Myrick (1997: 187) people are born into groups, live and work in groups, become dysfunctioning in groups, and can be helped in groups. Toseland and Rivas (2005: 12) define group work as a goal-directed activity with small treatment groups and task groups aimed at meeting socio-emotional needs and accomplishing tasks. Groups are uniquely suited to help persons grow and change in constructive ways (Johnson & Johnson, 2003: 517). That groups often exert powerful effects upon their members is obvious and will be a basic theme in this section.

A small group is a collection of between 3-12 individuals who are involved in face-to-face interaction to achieve a common goal. The term small group implies the ability of members to identify themselves as members to engage in interaction and exchange thoughts and feelings among themselves through verbal and non-verbal communication process. The group generates a sense of community, belonging, caring, understanding, acceptance, assistance and support to members, which foster the members' willingness to explore problems. Groups provide an arena for safe practice. A good working environment is one that promotes interaction in the group. Members achieve a sense of belonging, and through cohesion that develops they learn ways of caring and of challenging their situations. In this supportive environment, members can experiment with alternative behaviors. Ultimately, it is up to the members themselves to decide what changes they want to make (Clearly, 2004: 37; Corey, 2004: 6; Gladding, 1997: 172-174; Jacobs, Masson & Harvill, 1998: 4; Johnson & Johnson, 2003: 524; Myrick, 1997: 221; Steinberg, 2003: 99; Ward, 2002: 152-153).

According to Thompson and Rudolph (2000: 417) group interventions may be informational, developmental, and preventive in nature in that they can help children to function more effectively at each level of development or cope with specific problems that may affect their growth development. Their goal may be to assist members to communicate better, learn assertion skills, improve relationship skills, develop leadership skills, communicate with parents, say no to drugs or gangs or adjust to a new home life.

Jacobs, Masson and Harvil (1998: 347) state that adolescence is a difficult period in a young person's life. Therefore, voluntary growth, discussion, education and counseling groups can be quite valuable at this stage. Groups can help with identity problems, sexual concerns alcohol abuse and problems with parents, friends and school.

Gladding (1997: 172) describes life skill development groups as classified under educational groups. The primary function of these groups is the prevention of personal or societal disorders through the conveying of information and or the examining of values. Group participants may be taught for instance how to deal with a potential threat (e.g., HIV/AIDS), a developmental life event (e.g. growing older), or an immediate life crisis (e.g., the death of a loved one). A group leader working with adolescents should like and respect teenagers, want to learn more about their immediate world, and understand the kinds of struggles they go through while trying to grow up (Jacobs, Masson & Harvil: 1998: 347).

Group work provides an opportunity for members to identify and discuss acceptable and unacceptable social behaviors. It provides an opportunity for members to receive feedback. Groups allow adolescents more especially to openly question their values and to modify those that need to be changed. In the group, adolescents learn to communicate with their peers, they benefit from the modeling provided by the leader. In such groups, adolescents can safely experiment with reality, test their limits, express themselves, and be heard. These personal and interpersonal skills are achieved through the processes of increased self-awareness and self-disclosure to others (Corey, 2004: 7; Corey & Corey, 2002: 308; Geldard & Geldard, 2002: 215; Gladding, 1997: 111; Nelson-Jones, 1994: 274).

Another unique value of group work for adolescents is that it offers a chance for them to be instrumental in one another's growth. Because of the opportunities for interaction available in the group situation, the participants can express their concerns and be heard, and they can help one another on the road toward self-understanding and self-acceptance. Most important, a group gives adolescents a chance to express themselves and help one another in the struggle of self understanding and to interact with their peers (Corey, 2004: 7; Corey & Corey, 2002: 308).

According to Gladding (1997: 111) working in groups can be helpful to adolescents in making a successful transition from childhood to adulthood especially in regard to handling stressful situations. Membership in a supportive group strengthens one's identity as a person who is growing and changing. Working in groups appeals to many young people, especially as they learn how they often share common interests and concerns. These groups can provide support, facilitate new learning, help ease internal and external pressures, and offer hope and models for change. Such groups are conducted in community as well as schools setting and traditionally have an adult leader. They focus on common concerns such as identity, sexuality, parents, peers relationships, career goals, and educational problems. Young people who join these groups do so out of a sense of need and strive to gain knowledge and experiences to help them better handle their concerns (Gladding, 1997: 111; Johnson & Johnson, 2003: 525; Myrick, 1997: 187).

According to Jacobs, Masson and Harvil (1998: 348) sessions with adolescents should last between 40-90 minutes. The size of any kind of growth, support, educational and counseling group should be no more than eight members with six being ideal. Life skills group is best conducted in relatively small group. It allows the trainer to focus on the skills of individual members. Where there are two trainers, the overall size of the group can be considerably larger. Depending on the groups' purpose, the leader may want to lead all males, all females, or mix of both. The value of the coed group is that there is a lot of learning about the opposite sex during the adolescent years, and the group can be a

very good place to do so. The disadvantage to mixed groups is that members may be inhibited when the opposite sex is present. Life skills group often takes place in fixed length groups lasting six to ten sessions. The clients for life skills training groups frequently select themselves for membership. Sometimes people may be assigned to attend life skills training groups (Jacobs, Masson & Harvil, 1998: 348-349; Nelson-Jones, 1993: 233).

From this discussion group work can be viewed as a vehicle for helping people make changes in their attitudes, beliefs about themselves and others, feelings and behaviors. Therefore young people are more comfortable and willing to participate in groups to explore their ideas attitudes, feelings and behaviors especially as related to personal development. In the following section role-play as an activity used in groups is discussed.

#### **5.10.2.2 Role-playing**

According to Hoelson and Van Schalkwyk (2001: 264) role-play is a technique by which people take on different role to illustrate a situation or idea. It is an enactment of a social role in an imagined social situation. It is used to help people learn new ways of responding to specific life situations. It is viewed as a powerful tool for assessment, simulation, understanding, decision-making or behaviors change. Role playing techniques increase members' awareness and understanding of their interpersonal skills and produce behavior changes by providing members with corrective feedback. By role-playing, participants can learn how to express themselves more effectively, test reality, and practice new behaviors. Responses can be improved through feedback, rehearsal and coaching. Role-play can help children learn about cause and effect and experience the consequences of their behavior in a relatively safe setting. Once the children have chosen appropriate skills for use in a particular situation, they can help one another to devise a plan of action. Thus they are able to think about ways in which to implement the learnt social skill into the various settings of their own unique and individual environment

(Corey & Corey, 2002: 315, Hill & O' Brien, 1999: 273, Geldard & Geldard, 2002: 215; Thompson & Rudolph, 2000: 226; Toseland & Rivas, 2005: 297& 120).

When counseling adolescents, role-play is an excellent way of keeping the energy following. It keeps the interest level high and it gives a here-and-now flavor to the work being done (Geldard & Geldard, 1999: 137). Corey and Corey (2002: 315) note that role playing fosters creative problem solving, encourages spontaneity, usually intensifies feelings, and gets people to identify with others. During role-play many adolescents become actively involved in a very dynamic process. They can play parts of their lives in a highly charged and physical way, which for many young people is easier than sitting down and talking through issues. However, Geldard and Geldard (1999: 137) as well as Corey and Corey (2002: 316) state that engaging in role-playing does not suit all adolescents. Some are too self-conscious to allow themselves to play a role creatively. It is therefore essential for helpers to check out whether an adolescent is willing or not to use role-play. Sometimes adolescents will be willing to try out role playing if it is made clear to them that they may withdraw if they find that role is not comfortable or useful for them. When using role-play it is important for the young person to feel in control of the process and also to feel supported in what she does (Geldard & Geldard, 1999: 137).

According to Geldard and Geldard (1999: 137) role-play can be used for the following purposes:

- To gain an understanding of roles and relationships,
- To get in touch with feelings,
- To explore parts of the self,
- To make choices,
- To externalize beliefs or feelings and,
- To practice and experiment with new behaviors.

Role-play can be useful in helping adolescents explore their relationships with others and gain a better understanding of the issues involved in these relationships, both from their



own point and the perspectives of others. During role-play adolescent can act out, both verbally and non-verbally, ways in which they behave in their relationship with others (Corey & Corey, 2002: 315; Geldard & Geldard, 1999: 137). Therefore, Geldard and Geldard (1999: 137) suggest that when a young person is involved in role play it is important for the helper continually to observe his verbal and non-verbal behavior in order to detect underlying emotional feelings. When the group leader notices behaviors that suggest underlying emotions, which are not being openly acknowledged it can be useful to feed back the observed information to the young person. In addition role-play can be used to help adolescents recognize the difference between roles which they believe are functional and productive and roles which are dysfunctional and unproductive. They then have the opportunity to expand their repertoires of roles by learning to play new roles which have not been used previously (Geldard & Geldard, 1999: 137-138).

From the role-play experience, it is likely that the adolescent will gain an understanding of new own issues, feelings and thoughts, and will also gain some level of understanding of the others persons' perspectives.

### **5.10.2.3 Brainstorming**

One of the biggest benefits for people to work in groups is that they can brainstorm together. Hoelson and Van Schalkwyk (2001: 246) note that brainstorming is a frequently used method in life skills education. Often groups suffer when members do not produce a wide variety of ideas that be contrasted with each other. Brainstorming is a technique whereby people are asked in small groups to generate as many possible solutions as they can, someone recording these as they are suggested. It helps with problem solving. Problem solving depends on developing divergent views that conflict with each other. Brainstorming generates ideas for a wide base because it encourages all group members to participate fully. Through collaboration, more ideas can be produced than can be generated by either person alone. The purpose of brainstorming can be described as to increase the number of ideas generated by members (Anstey, 2002: 142; Johnson &

Johnson, 2003: 373; Hill & O' Brien, 1999: 311; Hoelson & Van Schalkwyk (2001: 246; Toseland & Rivas, 2005: 352).

According to Papier and Geshenfeld (1993) in Toseland and Rivas (2001:64) and Johnson and Johnson (2003: 373) the other benefits of brainstorming include the following:

- Dependence on a single authority is reduced,
- Opening sharing of ideas is encouraged,
- Members of highly competitive group can feel safe,
- A maximum output of ideas occur in a short period of time,
- Ideas are generated internally,
- It is enjoyable and self-stimulating and,
- It encourages divergent thinking.

The rationale for using brainstorming is the belief that many ideas are never born or are quickly stifled due to domineering members, stereotypes of each other other's expertise and intelligence, interpersonal conflict and silence, or fear to ridicule or evaluation. Brainstorming is preferred because participants are asked to spontaneously produce as many, and as uninhibited, ideas as they possibly can and to withhold criticism in order to optimize creativity. During brainstorming, total effort is directed toward creative thinking rather than to analytical or evaluative thinking. Evaluation is viewed as hampering creativity (Anstey, 2002: 142; Clearly, 2004: 49; Johnson & Johnson, 2003: 373-374; Toseland & Rivas, 2005: 352).

Brainstorming can be conducted in any size of the group, although large groups may inhibit idea generation and reduce member's ability to participate in the allotted time. Because brainstorming encourages the generation of creative and unique ideas, a heterogeneous membership representing many points of view facilitates the process. Groups that use brainstorming produce more ideas of higher quality than groups that do not use this approach (Toseland & Rivas, 2005: 353).

In the section above life skills education was explored. According to Hoelson and Van Schalkwyk (2001: 255) life skills education occurs through intervention programme known as life skills programme. In the following section the researcher briefly reviews life skills programme.

### **5.11 LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMME**

Brack (2000: 5) defines life skills programme as activities aimed at empowering people to internalise a repertoire of life skills according to their developmental tasks and specific problems of living. According to WHO (1997: 1-2) life skills programmes are educational programmes designed to promote positive health behaviour by enabling individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of every day life. The teaching of life skills is therefore practical and intended to equip the learner with new improved abilities. Effective life skills programme require that the participants collaborate in their effort to become empowered and to learn skills necessary to function optimally (Hoelson & Van Schalkwyk, 2001: 255).

Hoelson and Van Schalkwyk (2001: 255) state that life skills programmes aim at assisting people to become more balanced, independent and able to solve problems creatively in their daily lives. Life skills programmes are usually approached through a dynamic and active learning process. As life skills programmes are aimed at development of practical competence and behaviour, didactic teaching should be avoided and experiential learning encouraged (Ham, 1992 in Hoelson & Van Schalkwyk, 2001: 256).

According to Hoelson and Van Schalkwyk (2001: 257) facilitating skill learning process requires time. Permanent changes in attitudes and development of new skills do not take place in a brief period of learning, but require sufficient opportunities for practice. WHO (1994: 4) states that only when the intervention is maintained for a longer term, spanning

several years, to create longer-term improvements can we expect to have a significant and lasting impact on the participants.

Hoelson and Van Schalkwyk (2001: 255) note that learners can be encouraged to engage in the following activities in any life skill programme:

- **Introduction:** Participants each receive a nametag and are encouraged to introduce themselves to the group stating their name, age, affiliation, and some unique identifying aspect about themselves. The identifying aspect could be a favourite activity, an animal or object in nature they identify with or a key role they perceive for themselves.
- **Group rules:** Participants take turns listing rules of behaviour they would like to see implemented in the group and briefly explaining the consequences of the rule for the group process.
- **Group picture:** On a large piece of paper using markers, each member participates in making a picture of the group. Participants need to decide on a theme and assign each other roles for completing the picture. This process introduces the participants to the idea of negotiation and it promotes bonding.

While the above-mentioned factors contribute to the effectiveness of life skills programmes, they are not the only contributors to the success of life skills programmes. So that effective learning of life skills can take place there are certain requirements that have to be met. In the following section these requirements are discussed.

## **5.12 REQUIREMENTS FOR LEARNING LIFE SKILLS**

According to Potgieter (2004: 217) the acquisition of life skills requires a structured process of learning. Before we can focus on the process of life skill helping, we will first examine some of the basic requirements of learning life skills. These factors influence

how people initially learn life skills strengths and weaknesses. In the context of this study the focus will be on the following requirements namely a supportive relationship; learning from example; instruction and self-instruction; information and opportunity as well as learning from consequences.

### **5.12.1 A supportive relationship**

People require a supportive relationship when they engage in the process of learning, when people are attempting constructive changes and when they are venturing into frightening territory. This is based on the notion that people of all ages are the happiest and most effective when they feel that standing behind them is a person who will come to their aid should difficulties arise. This is particularly true when it comes to life skills development, for it is the relationship that enables people to risk trial-and error methods of learning and provides them with the security that is needed for the process. Reassuring or supporting behavior is intended to encourage and tell people that we believe in them. Making changes can be difficult, hence people feel supported when knowing that someone is on their side (Corey & Corey, 2002: 37; Hill & O' Brien, 1999: 315; Myrick, 1997: 140; Nelson-Jones, 1993: 13-16; Potgieter, 2004: 217).

Nelson-Jones (1993: 13-16) lists the following as advantages of making use of supportive relationship when working with children:

- Supportive relationship provides children with the security to engage in exploratory behavior and risk-trial-and-error learning. This enables them to collect information about themselves and their environments;
- Supportive relationships help children listen better to themselves. By feeling prized and accurately understood, children can get more in touch with their wants, wishes and personal meanings;
- Children may feel freer to manifest emerging life skills without risk of ridicule;

- Instruction in specific skills is frequently best conducted in the context of supportive relationships in which the anxiety attached to learning is diminished;
- The presence or absence of supportive relationship can either affirm or disconfirm children's sense of worth. They may either be helped to become confident to face life's challenges or they may become inhibited, withdrawn, and afraid to take risks. Alternatively, they may mask their insecurity by excessive attention seeking.

Learning is regarded as most effective within a supportive helping relationship. People need to hear supporting statements to make them more disposed to take constructive action in issues that affect them. Children, who learn in a supportive relationship where they are understood and prized, feel confident to engage in exploratory behavior. They are better able to take the risks involved in learning new skills. However it should be noted that too much support might send the message that people are unable to support themselves (Corey & Corey, 2002: 37; Nelson-Jones, 1993: 19; Nelson-Jones, 1995: 352; Scissons, 1993: 124).

### **5.12.2 Learning from example**

Potgieter (2004: 217) notes that experience is one of the best teachers, especially in the case of life skills development. People learn from the examples set by others and from the behaviors they demonstrate around them. Learning from example is a major way in which people acquire life skills strengths and weaknesses (Nelson-Jones, 1994: 147; Nelson-Jones, 1995: 363).

According to Burnard, (1989: 1) as well as Johnson and Johnson (2003: 50-55) people cannot learn to be interpersonally competent by reading books on the subject, nor by listening to lectures on the topic. People learn through living and doing. Nelson-Jones (1994: 14) further mentions that people may absorb from example deficient skills for thinking, feeling and action and then possess the added barrier of remaining unaware that

this has happened. If parents and others use ineffective thinking skills, for example blaming and over-generalizing, children may be quick to do likewise.

According to Potgieter (2004: 217) experiential learning is a process that relies on personal experiences and people's reflection on such experiences. It starts with a concrete experience that provides learners with opportunities for meaningful discovery and expects them to sort things out for themselves by restructuring their perceptions of the event.

### **5.12.3 Instruction and self-instruction**

According to Nelson-Jones (1994: 20) while helpers can encourage clients to do their own work, clients often require instruction as well. Instruction is regarded as major transmitter of life skills. Much life skills instruction takes place informally in the home. Parents frequently tell children how to relate, how to study, how to look after their health and so on. Relatives and peers can also be other providers of instruction outside the home. Nevertheless life skills programmes are considered important in instilling life skills to children. Much informal life skills instruction takes place in the school settings in such areas as career education, drug education etc. In addition a range of life skills programmes may be offered in colleges targeting areas such as relationships skills, stress management and effective thinking. Most often participation in such programmes is voluntary (Nelson-Jones, 1993: 20 & 364-365).

Instruction within life skills takes place as people rework and practice the original concepts and skills. According to Nelson-Jones (1994: 20) good helpers should always be on the lookout for ways of presenting material so clearly that clients learn to instruct themselves. In addition helpers can also make use of books, training manuals, self-help cassettes and videos as instructional sources.

#### **5.12.4 Information and opportunity**

Information is regarded as an important source of power. People need adequate and reliable information to develop life skills. Intentionally or unintentionally, adults often relate to their children on the basis of lies, omission of truth. Furthermore, necessary information may not be readily available for children outside their home. This lack of information hinders children from making right choices. For instance keeping children in ignorance about basic facts of sexuality and death impedes self-awareness and emotional responsiveness (Anstey, 2002: 26; Nelson-Jones, 1995: 365; Nelson-Jones, 1994: 15-16; Potgieter, 2004: 217).

In addition people need opportunities to test out and develop life skills. These opportunities need to be in line with their maturation and state of readiness. Lack of information and opportunities give rise to struggles and contribute to levels of mistrust in relations. Over and above it reduces the capacity of people to understand each other (Anstey, 2002: 26; Nelson-Jones, 1995: 365 & Nelson-Jones, 1994: 15-16; Potgieter, 2004: 217).

#### **3.12.5 Learning from consequences**

Learning from observing role models is frequently intermingled with learning from rewarding or unrewarding consequences. People acquire skills with learning from rewarding or unrewarding consequences. Rewarding consequences can be either primary or secondary. Primary rewarding consequences are ones that people find independent of their learning: for example, food and shelter. Secondary rewards include rewards such as approval or money. Secondary rewarding consequences are viewed as playing a big part in helping or hindering people from acquiring skills. Providing positive rewards such as praise or approval increases the probability of skill development. If they are offered appropriately children can develop necessary skills needed to improve their well-being. However, sometimes children are rewarded for exhibiting skills deficits rather than strengths (Nelson-Jones, 1993: 14; Nelson-Jones, 1995: 365).



The following section looks at ways in which social work practitioners can contribute to life skills education. Focus specifically is on the role of social workers.

### **5.13 THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN LIFE SKILL EDUCATION**

Social workers are called to work with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities to address concerns that limit their social functioning. The focus of social work is on the improvement of the social functioning of people in interaction with their environment (Zastrow, 2000: 48). The social work profession exists because there will always be people who are vulnerable, less fortunate, helpless, exploited and often unable to help themselves. With the rise of HIV/AIDS there are almost overwhelming signs of poverty, despondency, crime, abuse of children, abuse of substances like alcohol and drugs. In such a context, social work as a profession aims the change the conditions through appropriate action. It is the function of social work to identify needs and problems that affect the social functioning of people and to facilitate actions that might resolve or minimize this (Potgieter, 2004: 4-5 & 28-30; Zastrow, 2000: 48-49).

As already mentioned earlier the object of life skills education is to help people increase the probability of making good rather than poor choices in the targeted skills. This requires exposure to training programmes that are specifically designed to make people self sufficient and self reliant rather than being recipients of services. Social workers encourage client systems to believe in their own capacity affect change. Life skill development programmes serve as basic resources and facilities that social welfare agencies offer to the community. Social workers assume the responsibility of linking people to these programmes and stimulate the development of new resources where necessary to supplement the empowerment efforts of clients. What the social worker gives is not power, but the climate, relationship, resources and procedures to develop life skills which the client then utilize in order to take control of their lives (Compton & Galaway, 1994: 20-21; Potgieter, 2004: 216-217 & 29-30).

The acquisition of life skills requires a structured process of learning (Potgieter, 2004: 217). Such learning normally takes place as part of the process of socialization. Due to a number of reasons, many people find themselves in situations for which they lack preparation and appropriate coping mechanisms. The social worker sees these people as having potential and believes in their ability to grow and develop. Education is often the most appropriate strategy when assisting people to enhance their quality of life. Appropriate knowledge and skills are often all that is needed to affect change. Within an educational framework social workers can use a variety of training interventions to assist clients with specific problems.

As noted earlier, deficiencies in life skills contribute to low self-esteem, loneliness and parent-child problems. The social worker enables the client to gain the capacity to interact with their environment in ways that enhance their need gratification, well-being and satisfaction (Hepworth & Larsen 1993: 495; Potgieter, 2004: 216). The social worker believes that clients have many competencies, skills and knowledge available within themselves and accepts that they can achieve even more if they focus on their strengths rather than on their weakness or problems. The focus of the helper is not so much on problems, or on what is lacking or wrong, but rather on growth and the potential of people to develop through the utilization of available strengths (Potgieter, 2004: 9 & 216). The social work profession seeks to tap this inherent wisdom through the use of a helping relationship.

According to Potgieter (2004: 217) social workers should create a climate that is conducive to the development of life skills. The social worker should provide a supportive atmosphere by creating a positive environment in which trust and respect are communicated and modelled. Supportive and accepting climates induce listening, understanding and trust; and promote willingness to cooperate and provide mutual assistance. When clients feel safe they feel trusting and free to be open and share their thoughts and feelings. This climate is generated by the social worker's capacity to be honest, and sincere (Anstey, 2002: 183; Hackney & Cormier, 1994: 29).

Life skills education has its roots on empowerment approach. Empowerment practice on the other hand draws from social work. It incorporates the basic values of the social work profession. The social workers professional commitment to client self-determination and self-actualization plays a significant role in life skills. Furthermore, clients and workers must effectively engage in the creation of an environment compatible with human needs; that is congruent with the practice of social work. The goal of social work practice asserts that social workers are obliged to help groups at risk increase their personal, interpersonal and socioeconomic strength by improving their life circumstances (Gutierrez, Parsons & Cox, 1998: 5-6; Zastrow, 2000: 59).

According to Nelson-Jones (1993: 227) life skills training most often implies running structured groups of limited duration to train participants in one or more specific skills. Overall, social workers are in a strong position to teach life skills because of their skills training and knowledge. Social work practitioners use skills to help meet the needs of their clients. A social worker is a multiskilled professional. Their group work knowledge enables them to lead groups with skill. The primary social work roles assumed in empowerment practice are teacher/trainer, resource consultant and awareness raiser. The social worker applies these group leadership skills to clients, to empower them to stand for themselves (Gutierrez, Parsons & Cox, 1998: 13; Zastrow, 2000: 67).

Life skills' helping is a growing area. In the next section life skill helping will be discussed with specific emphasis on the so-called DASIE model as an intervention model to enhance life skills.

#### **5.14 LIFE SKILLS IN THE CONTEXT OF A HELPING APPROACH**

Hill and O'Brien (1999: 3) note that most people need assistance at some point in their lives to deal with troublesome issues that hinder their personal growth and limit their potential. Helping can be defined as a process of assisting people in exploring feelings,

and gaining insight, and making positive changes in their lives (Hill & O'Brien, 1999: 4). It is viewed as an effective means for people to discover direction for their lives, and receive feedback that can facilitate change.

Many children experience pain, rage, and frustration because from an early age their needs have been thwarted or blocked. This is particularly true for persons who grew up in families where there was a great deal of conflict, stress, and/or impaired boundaries (Hackney & Cormier, 1994: 2; Geldard & Geldard, 2002: 21).

According to Nelson-Jones (1994: 2) life skills helping is a people-centered approach for assisting client and others to develop self-helping skills. It is a people-centered approach, meaning that all people may benefit at some stage of their lives from contact with skilled helpers. Life skill helping involves helpers in making choices that assist clients to develop life skills. The goal of life skill helping emphasizes helping people to help themselves by acquiring skills for living. Hill and O'Brien (1999: 6) mention that these skills might include learning how to communicate with others, practicing ways to resolve conflicts, identifying decision making strategies or changing unhealthy habits (e.g. having unprotected anonymous sex.)

Nelson-Jones (1994: x) further states that life skills helping approach seeks to develop clients' self-helping skills so that they become their own best helpers. The approach is based on the following assumptions:

- To live effectively clients need to learn and then maintain good life skills;
- Though external factors contribute, clients sustain problems because of weakness in one or more life skills. It is assumed that all people have acquired and sustain life skills strengths and weaknesses. Life skills helpers collaborate with clients to detect the life skills weaknesses that sustain difficulties and then, within supportive relationships, educate them in relevant self-helping skills;

- After helping, clients often repeat problematic behaviors when faced with the same or similar problems to those that brought them to helping. Helpers have insufficiently assisted them to learn and maintain relevant life skills;
- The aim of helping is to provide clients with self-helping skills for managing not only current but future problems. People-centeredness involves showing clients how to become their own best helpers (Nelson-Jones, 1994, x).

Life skills' helping is a process. This implies that clients and helpers collaborate in such activities as clarifying problems, redefining problems in skills terms, setting goals, choosing interventions, setting session agendas and evaluating progress. Client participation in decision-making is emphasized. Helpers need both good training and good helping relationship skills to be effective. Such helpers are likely to be helping service professionals and para-professionals such as counselors, psychologists, social workers, probation officers, nurses and personnel officers among others. At all times helpers must attempt to be psychologically present in interviews as genuine and caring people (Nelson-Jones, 1994: 6-7; Potgieter, 2004: 216-217).

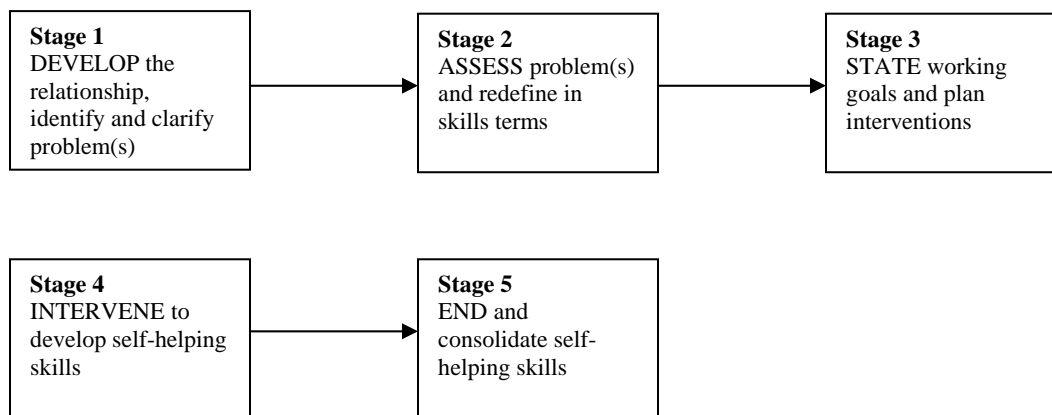
The practice of life skills helping is structured around DASIE, a systematic five state model for helping clients both to manage problems and to alter problematic life skills (Nelson-Jones, 1994: 32). The model provides a framework or set of guidelines for helper choices. Nelson-Jones (1994: 32) and Nelson-Jones (1995: 370) note that the use of the acronym is deliberate; it is intended to assist beginning helping service trainees to remember the five stages when faced with the anxiety of working with clients for the first time. The stages of the model are as follows:

- D Develop** the relationship, identify and clarify problems(s)
- A Assess** the problems(s) and redefine in skill terms
- S State** working goals and plan interventions
- I Intervene** to develop self-helping skills
- E End** and consolidate self-helping skills.

According to Nelson-Jones (1994: 30) the five-stage model lends itself to both individual and group training interventions. The focus in life skills helping is on developing skills for life and not just for the immediate present. Life skills helpers assist clients to alter underlying patterns of problematic skills and develop skills for use across a range of settings for the present and in the future. Effective helpers focus both on the relationship and also on the task of helping clients develop life skills. Helping relationships are tools to support clients as they learn self-support.

Life skills' helping is not the mechanistic application of a set of techniques but helpers work within the context of person-to person relationships to develop clients' self-helping skills. The personhood of both helpers and clients is central to the approach. The life skills helping model requires helpers to develop a range of specific interventions related to clients' problems and problematic skills (Nelson-Jones 1994, 57).

In figure 2 the DASIE – five stage life skills helping model is graphically displayed.



(Adapted from Nelson-Jones, 1994: 32)

**Figure 2: DASIE: The five-stage life skills helping model**

According to Nelson-Jones (1994: 52) the stages tend to overlap and there may be reversion to earlier stages, as more information or new problems arise during the intervention stage. There are basically two assumptions that underlie the DASIE model:

- Much helping is relatively short term i.e. three to ten sessions. Often very brief helping contacts take place because clients have immediate agendas that require attention.
- The model tends to be focused on one or two major problems or problematic skills areas

Based on Nelson-Jones (1994: 52-78) and Nelson-Jones (1995: 370-378) below is a discussion of each stage of DASIE:

- **Stage 1: Develop the relationship, identify and clarify problem(s)**

In stage one, helpers develop supportive relationship with clients and work with them to identify and clarify problems. Life skills helping as a process places heavy emphasis on building supportive working relationships with clients. Such relationships go beyond helpers showing empathy, non-possessive warmth and genuineness to the more active fostering of client self-support. Helpers support clients emotionally and technically. Emotionally, they support clients as they tell their stories, gain insight into their patterns of skills strengths and weaknesses and strive to manage problems and develop skills strengths. Technically, helpers support clients in analyzing their skills strengths and weaknesses, setting realistic goals planning for change and in implementing interventions.

In this stage, the primary emphasis is on providing emotional support as clients tell their stories and share their frames of reference. In subsequent stages, whilst still offering emotional support, helpers support clients by offering specific expertise or act as psychological educators.

- **Stage 2: Assess problems(s) and redefine in skills terms**

In stage two, helpers and clients collaborate to build definitional bridges between describing and actively working on problems and problematic skills. In stage one,

problems have been described, amplified and clarified largely in everyday language. Therefore in stage two, helpers' build upon information collected in stage one to explore hypotheses about how clients think and act that sustains difficulties. Helpers add to and go beyond clients' present perceptions to look for "handles" on how to work for change. They collaborate with clients in breaking their problems into their component skills weaknesses. This stage ends with redefinitions of problems in skills terms.

While doing this it is important that helpers support clients in making sense of their stories. Clients are provided with space to explore and experience their thoughts, feelings and personal meanings. Helpers are mirrors that allow clients to see their reflections and then, when ready, to further in self-understanding. Helpers need to develop good skills in redefining problems in skills terms and in communicating these working definitions to clients.

- **Stage 3: State working goals and plan interventions**

In the previous stages the counselor and the clients moved from descriptive definitions of problems to skills redefinitions of problems. Stage three builds on the redefinitions in skills terms to focus on the question "What is the way to manage problems and develop requisite skills?" In stage three, helpers translate skills redefinitions into working goals and plan interventions to attain goals. Stage three consists of two phases: stating goals and planning interventions.

The helper is there, to help the clients to set working goals. If necessary, the helper needs to restate and check clients' overall goals. Working goals need to be stated clearly, realistically, succinctly and where appropriate with a time frame. How helpers think influences how well they set working goals.

Having stated goals, helpers need to determine how best to help clients attain them. Interventions are actions on the part of helpers designed to help clients attain goals. There is no single best way to plan interventions, since clients' problems and underlying



problematic skills vary so much. It is important therefore for helpers to try to involve clients as much as possible. Then, at different stages of helping, the helper can negotiate with clients what goals and interventions are important.

- **Stage 4: Intervene to develop self-helping skills**

In stage four, within the context of supportive relationships helpers intervene to develop clients' self-helping skills. The intervention stage has two objectives: to help clients manage their presenting problems better; and to assist clients in working on their problematic skills patterns and developing skills strengths. Helpers assist clients in assuming responsibility for managing problems and altering problematic skills. Good helping relationship skills are important during this stage. Clients feel more supported if they think that helpers understand what they go through both in having problems and in trying to cope with them.

Individual sessions in the intervention stage may be viewed in four phases: preparatory, initial, working and ending. The preparatory phase entails helpers thinking in advance on how best to assist clients. The initial phase consists of meeting, greeting and seating then giving permission to talk. The working phase focuses on specific interventions designed to help clients' manage problems and develop life skills. The ending phase focuses on summarizing the major session learning, negotiating homework, strengthening commitment to between-session work, and rehearsing and practicing skills outside helping.

To be effective in their practice helpers should keep abreast of relevant theoretical and research literature on how to best to intervene for specific problems and skills weaknesses. Furthermore, helpers require a repertoire of thinking skills and action skills interventions about which they are knowledgeable, and which they are skilled. It is insufficient to know what interventions to offer without also being skilled in how to offer them.

- **Stage 5: End and consolidate self-helping skills**

In stage five, the helping contact ends with further attention to consolidating clients' self-helping skills. Ideally, ending is based on both parties perceiving that clients have made appreciable gains in their ability to manage their problems, and that they have consolidated their gains into self-helping skills for use afterwards. The topic of ending should be brought well in advance before the final session. This allows both parties to work through the various task and relationship issues connected with encoding the contact. A useful option is to fade contact with some clients by seeing them progressively less often. Certain clients may appreciate the opportunity for booster sessions. Booster sessions provide both clients and helpers with the chance to review progress and consolidate self-helping skills. Scheduling follow-up telephone call can perform some of these functions too.

## **5.15 CONCLUSION**

The central premise of this chapter is that life skills are an important means of addressing the many social crises worldwide. This is particularly true in South African context in which our historical legacy of restricted opportunities and challenges brought about by poverty and HIV/AIDS. These circumstances require creative opportunities that will be to individuals and communities advantage. The development of life skills programmes is viewed as crucial in assisting people to become more balanced, independent and able to solve problems creatively. Life skills education programme encompasses a wide range of skills necessary for effective living i.e. the enhancement of an individual's physical, emotional and psychological well-being. They are geared at empowering individuals towards dealing effectively with daily demands and challenges.

The need to equip people effectively and efficiently with the required life skills cannot be overemphasized. Life skills, facilitated in the context of a life skills programme may equip people to cope better with their needs and ever-changing life challenges. In the next chapter the newly developed life skills programme for AIDS orphans is presented.

It explores the nature and the purpose of the programme; programme content as well as specific activities aimed at the development of practical competence and behaviour.