Teacher Tips for Life Skills Training in Special Ed

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Bright Hub Education

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Life skills training is an important part of a special education classroom. We as teachers need to make an effort to fit in life skills training into our schedule. This article describes some of the important components of a special education life skills curriculum.

- Life skills refer to those skills that are required for daily living. They include self-care skills, as well as other community related skills like social skills, environmental manipulation and shopping. Given below is an outline for a special education life skills curriculum which you can integrate into your lesson plans and IEP’s.

**Self Care Skills:**

The self care skills can be broadly classified into eating, dressing, bathing, toileting and grooming.

In **eating** we need to consider position of feeding, modified spoons and other aids to help feeding. We need to train bringing food to mouth, chewing and swallowing. There are exercises and techniques to help chewing and swallowing. We also need to consider any behavior problems associated with feeding time. Curriculum can also include the names of different meals, and the names of commonly used food items. We can also teach social skills related to eating like table manners. For an older child we can teach simple food preparation, serving and cleaning up.

For **dressing** we should consider teaching the child the simple act of folding and putting away clothes. The curriculum should also include use of fasteners like zipping and buttoning. Dressing will also include putting on and taking off shoes and socks. We need to teach the names of all the items frequently used in dressing. We need to teach a child to take off, and put on different clothing articles. We also teach front/ back, right/ left and inside/ out. Breaking up skills into small components will make it easier for children to learn.

In **bathing**, the curriculum must cover the need to bathe and be clean as well, as the concept of clean and dirty. We can also teach body parts and names of objects found in the bathroom. The child may require adaptations to bathe independently. Bathing is broadly classified into three steps -- soaping, rinsing and toweling.

In **toileting**, we need to first consider if the child is independent in toileting. The child needs to learn indicating initially. We should consider if he will be able to transfer himself to the toilet on his own or if he will need any support with that. We need to ensure that the toilet is modified to be safe and accessible for the special needs child. We need to teach the child that urine must be
passed only in the toilet and not outside. In a classroom situation, we need to schedule toilet breaks to prevent accidents.

**Grooming** includes face wash, hand wash, nail care, shaving, combing, brushing teeth and make up. Initially we focus on basic grooming like combing, face wash and hand wash. The child needs to learn the steps of each task. The child also needs to learn the importance of doing these tasks.

- **Shopping**

Shopping is another important life skill that needs to be part of a curriculum. This can be taught using stories, role play, pretend play and field visits. Along with shopping the child needs to understand the use and **value of money**.

- **Communication**

Communication is an important life skill. We need to help the child learn to communicate through modern technology for communication like telephones, emails, Internet and letters. Curriculum will include learning about the different methods of communication, and practising their use.

- **Environmental Manipulation**

It refers to using and manipulating various objects for daily use like locks, doorknobs, latches, lift, taps, stoves, microwave, TV remote, switches etc. Use real objects to practice and learn these skills so that the child will be able to use them in real life.

- **Cleanliness**

This refers to the child’s immediate environment and includes basic household tasks like washing clothes, and dishes, washing cars, keeping floors and carpets clean, arranging shelves, dusting etc. The child needs to understand the need for these life skill activities and needs to be taught how to do them. Children should also be given opportunities to practice these skills as chores in the home or classroom. This will prepare him or her for independent living.

- **Cooking/ Meal Preparation**

This is another skill that will be an important part of a special education life skills curriculum. Start with simple dishes like sandwiches and juice, and you will be forming a base for helping a child to be independent at a later stage in life.

- The main goal of life skills training is that a child will be independent. However, life skills training will be unique for every child. Every child has different abilities, different difficulties and different ways of learning. Moreover children will need different adaptations. Be sensitive to these differences as you train children in life skills.
Another important factor is that life skills training can never be successful without the involvement and participation of parents. Make sure you involve them right from the planning stage. When your training program is customized according to their home situation, it will be a lot more effective in the long run.