

LIFE SKILLS

Stuff you might not learn in school but you should probably know anyway!

Ever since you were small you've probably heard countless people tell you how important education is to your future. Although education is crucial, there are many things that you need to know that aren't taught in most high school classes. While not as important as reading, writing and arithmetic, these are still very necessary life skills that can make getting along in this world much easier (and a lot more fun!)

Life skills are things that you should know how to do by the time you become an adult. Check and see how many of these things you can already do, and make it a point to learn how to do those things you can't do yet. If a disability prevents you from actually doing some of these things, you can design or identify support or technology to assist you in doing some of the skills, or you can learn how to instruct someone to help you with them.



DOMESTIC SKILLS:

- Cook (don't just open and pour!) breakfast, lunch and dinner
- Wash and iron clothes without ruining them (plus removing spots and stains)
- Replace a button, baste a fallen hem and polish your own shoes



SOCIAL SKILLS:

- Carry on a conversation for 15 minutes with a person you don't know
- Speak before a small group of friends for a few minutes
- Tell a joke well enough so that everyone gets it and maybe even laughs
- Learn enough ballroom dancing so that you can have fun at parties (trust us on this one!)
- Identify acceptable dress and behavior for a variety of situations
- Order and dine in restaurants, pay for service and tip



PHYSICAL SKILLS, RECREATION AND LEISURE:

- Stay physically fit – strong, flexible, have stamina, and avoid being overweight
- Throw and catch balls of different sizes without breaking your fingers
- Swim and float in water
- Ride a bicycle
- Play games (like checkers, chess, or bridge) with friends
- Be able to arrange social activities

HEALTH SKILLS:

- Understand your body and how your health condition affects you. Describe your condition to others
- Know how to keep yourself healthy (good nutrition, daily exercise, don't smoke or use drugs or alcohol) and be alert to signs of any secondary disabilities you might get (such as skin problems, infections, depression or obesity)
- Know the names and side-effects of your medications and take your meds in the right dose at the right time

SKILLS TO WORK WITH YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS:

- Know who your primary care doctor, dentist and specialists are (name, address, phone number and how to contact them)
- Make your own appointments
- Have plans for emergencies
- Understand how to find and evaluate good healthcare providers
- Keep an up-to-date file of your medical records
- Carry a one-page portable medical summary in your billfold or purse

INSURANCE SKILLS:

- Know your insurance plan name, address, case manager's name and contact information, and be responsible for your insurance ID card
- Know what benefits are covered and be prepared to make co-payments as necessary
- Know how to submit bills for payment and handle disputes as necessary

OUTDOOR SKILLS:

- Spend the day in the woods with friends without getting lost, bitten or covered with a rash
- Bait a hook, catch a fish, then clean and cook it
- Know enough about plants and wildlife in your area to identify a few and be safe

SURVIVAL SKILLS:

- Know basic first-aid and maintain a complete first-aid kit
- Know what to do if you get sick—especially if you are alone
- Know when to defend yourself and how to be effective when doing so
- Perform CPR
- Know that you should NOT: overload electrical sockets, mix ammonia with bleach, use appliances around water, barbecue in the house, or start the car in the garage without first opening the garage door

ORIENTATION SKILLS:

- Get around town on a bus even if you usually walk or drive
- Read a map—including road maps
- Know how to determine north, south, east and west without a compass when you are outside.

PRACTICAL SKILLS:

- Type well with both hands in the normal manner
- Set up your own computer system
- Drive a car, including one with a manual transmission, and know how to maintain it properly-- like checking the oil regularly
- Know how to change a flat tire
- Use shopping skills-- like how to judge quality and find bargains
- Know how to rent an apartment



ARTISTIC SKILLS:

- Draw an illustration at least well enough to get your point across
- Have enough confidence to sing aloud even when everyone else can hear you
- Know how to play a musical instrument well enough to enjoy playing in a group
- Learn how to take a decent photograph so you won't be disappointed when it is developed

HUMAN SKILLS:

- Care for a dog, cat or other animal including when it is sick
- Baby-sit for children ranging in age from 6 months to 6 years old
- Aid an elderly or other person in need
- Don't be too embarrassed to say "I don't know" or too proud to say "I'm sorry"
- Volunteer in your community
- Use communication skills necessary to interact with peers, authority figures and community members

HANDY PERSON SKILLS:

- Hang a picture straight without making extra holes in the wall
- Paint a wall neatly, including cleaning up the mess
- Know what tools perform what functions and how to use them properly around the house



ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS:

- Create a budget. Remember: it takes longer to earn money than to spend it!
- Balance a checkbook without a computer program even if you bank online
- Maintain an address book and a personal appointment calendar
- Set up a filing system to keep all the important paperwork in your life in one place

EDUCATIONAL AND EMPLOYMENT SKILLS:

- Know how to register to take college entrance exams (SAT/ACT, etc.)
- Know how to apply to college and vocational schools and how to get financial aid, scholarships, etc.
- Identify activities of interest and find community resources
- Know personal learning styles, career interests and opportunities
- Advocate for yourself regarding necessary job or school accommodations
- Write a resume
- Write a cover letter for your resume or job application
- Complete a job application and interview for a job
- Use interpersonal skills needed to maintain employment
- Have job experience through volunteer work, part-time and summer jobs
- Identify people and agencies to assist in job searches

OTHER SKILLS:

- Understand your own strengths and limitations
- Know laws, policies, rights and responsibilities for adults with disabilities
- Vote in elections

We hope that this list has given you lots of things to think about and goals to achieve on your road to independence.

Adapted from: Marilyn vos Savant (2002) Growing Up: A Classic American Childhood: What Kids Should Know Before They Leave Home. NY: Norton and KY CCSHCN, Competencies for Young People Transitioning to Post-Secondary School and/or Work