



Life Skills

for children

Author: Dr Samir Parikh

Co-Authors: Kamna Chhibber, Divya Jain, Aditi Kaul



Life Skills



for children





MACMILLAN

© Macmillan Publishers India Private Ltd, 2016

All rights reserved under the copyright act. No part of this publication may be reproduced, transcribed, transmitted, stored in a retrieval system or translated into any language or computer language, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, magnetic, optical, chemical, manual, photocopy or otherwise without the prior permission of the copyright owner. Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

First published 2016

MACMILLAN PUBLISHERS INDIA PRIVATE LIMITED

Delhi Bengaluru Chennai Kolkata Mumbai
Ahmedabad Bhopal Chandigarh Coimbatore
Cuttack Guwahati Hyderabad Jaipur Lucknow Madurai
Nagpur Patna Pune Thiruvananthapuram Visakhapatnam

Published by Macmillan Publishers India Private Ltd,
21, Patullos Road, Chennai 600002, India

“This book is meant for educational and learning purposes. The author(s) of the book has/have taken all reasonable care to ensure that the contents of the book do not violate any copyright or other intellectual property rights of any person in any manner whatsoever. In the event the author(s) has/have been unable to track any source and if any copyright has been inadvertently infringed, please notify the publisher in writing for any corrective action.”

Contents

Life Skills

Life Skills: Setting The Context.....	01
Self-Awareness.....	03
People Skills.....	06
Thinking Skills.....	10
Case Study.....	16



MAGMILLAN LIFE SKILLS



LIFE SKILLS: SETTING THE CONTEXT

All of us have times in our lives where we are happy, sad, angry, scared or excited. For some, scoring bad marks in an exam is not ok and causes stress and feeling bad, while for someone fighting with a best friend leads to a feeling of being lonely and being unhappy. For some of us, being thin and having clear skin makes us feel good about ourselves, and if we are unable to achieve it we feel ugly and ignored.

Our ideas, thoughts and feelings come from what we see on various media, hear from our friends and school as well as our parents and the community we reside in. Our beliefs about problems, the way they can be solved and situations mediated are related to these various factors. This chapter helps us look at the skills needed to handle challenges and problems in life and how to create steps to effectively deal with them in the future.

For example, what would I do when someone is teasing me? How do I learn to feel good about myself? Can I learn to communicate better with friends and family so I don't make them feel hurt, sad, or alone? Can I learn to be creative and try new things, without thinking of what people will say about me? These and other such questions are answered with a focus on the "How to" across the chapter.

Before we look at how to acquire Life Skills it is important to know which skills are important. UNICEF and WHO have outlined the following as being the areas to look at in order to improve the quality of life:-

- **Self-awareness**—It is the skill to understand oneself, and know our strengths, weaknesses, fears, likes and dislikes, what gives us happiness, how we think of different situations and what we think of our own self.
- **Empathy**—It is the ability to think and feel from the other persons perspective and look at how the other must be feeling before we communicate with them.



- **Communication (working with others)** – It is the skill that helps us make and keep friends, reduce fighting with our families, and put our ideas and problems forward to others without hurting them.
- **Creative thinking** – It is the ability to look at situations creatively and think of new ways to handle problems.
- **Decision-making** – After getting to know who we are and what we want, we need to use this information to make good choices without always needing other people to tell us what to do.

These skills come together to help us deal with the everyday problems that we have. For example, to make a good choice, we need to know what we want (self-awareness), look at the problem and think of different ways to solve it (creative thinking) and then take a decision (decision making). This gives us the power to look at the positive and practical side of situations, and work towards finding an answer instead of just feeling bad about it.





SELF-AWARENESS

Our friends and family are very important to us, and many times, we do things only to make them happy, even if it is something we do not like. Maybe you want to learn how to play the guitar but your parents want you to learn how to dance. Maybe you like to wear red but your friend makes fun of you or thinks you should wear green. All this can sometimes make us feel confused about what it is that we really like, and what we really want to do. And that is why it is important for us to know ourselves a little better, so we can know whether we are doing something because we really want to, or only because somebody else wants us to.

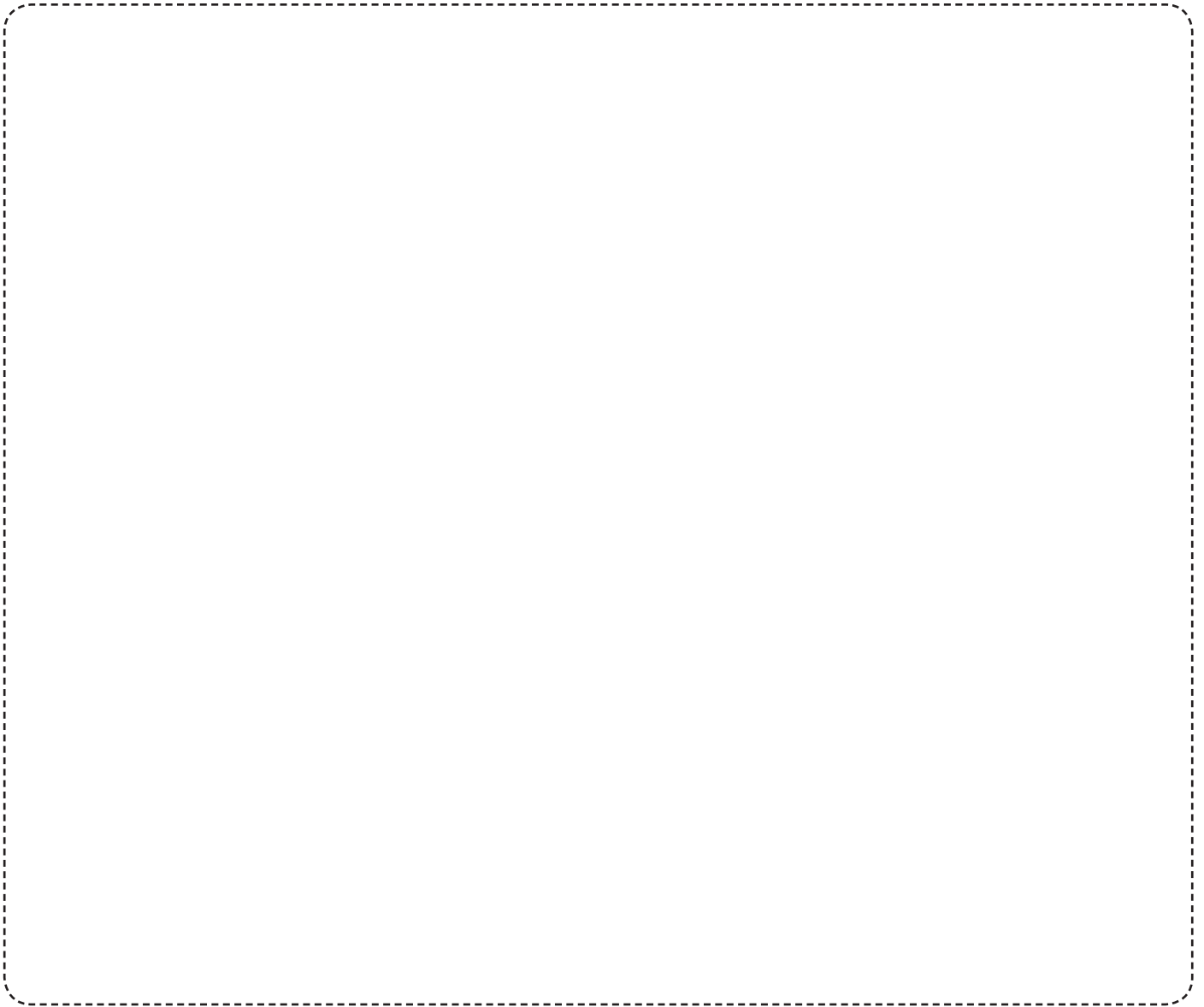
It is important for us to know what we are good at, and also what we are not very good at so that we can build on our strengths. When we face difficulties it is important to remember our strengths as they help us deal with tough situations.



Instructions:

If you were a superhero, what kind superhero would you be? What are your real life strengths that can be your superpowers? Is it your supersonic smile that brings joy to people even in their saddest moments? Is it your friendship cloak that protects you against attacks from others? Is it your bubblegum hair that you can blow to reach your highest goals?

In the space given below, draw yourself as a superhero. Think about the weapons and powers you want to depict. Also give a name to your superhero.



Classroom Activity:

Concept: To help students identify the different parts of themselves that they might not be readily aware of and demonstrate how even though we are all unique, we can also have similar strengths and weaknesses.

Instructions:

- On separate chits, write 7 words that represent you, for example, intelligent, funny, clumsy or lazy. Put all chits into a basket in the center of the classroom and mix up the basket.
- One by one, pick up 5 chits from the basket at random and see if they also describe the kind of person you are. Discuss how many of the chits you picked up that also described you accurately. Share how you feel at the end of the activity.

Mode: Large group (full class)

Time: 45 minutes

FAQs

1. What are the different activities that can help us get to know ourselves better?

Talking about our feelings to our friends and parents is a good way to know ourselves better. Writing a diary, drawing, music or dance, or playing a sport all help us understand ourselves better.

2. What if there is nothing good about me?

All of us have a mix of good and bad things about us. If you think there is nothing good about you, then you are focusing too much on the bad qualities and ignoring the things that are good about you.

3. Can having the best toys, gadgets, and clothes make me feel better about myself?

Buying nice or expensive things might make some of us feel a little better, but this good feeling does not last for too long, because you will always compete with others in your class to have the nicest things. It's better to focus on your personal qualities, talents and relationships with friends and family to feel better about yourself.

4. Can I use drawing and painting to express myself as it is easier than talking?

Yes, many children find it easier to show how they are feeling through drawing, painting, dancing or writing, rather than talking, and it is a great way to express our feelings.

5. Don't we always know ourselves anyway?

We all think we know ourselves, but many times we ignore or don't concentrate on some strengths or weaknesses. A lot of times, we believe what our friends or family say about us, without really trying those things ourselves. It is also a good idea to try new activities like different sports and hobbies to know what we're good at.





People Skills

Empathy

A lot of us have been made fun of for being too fat or thin, too tall or short, too smart or stupid, for wearing glasses or braces, for straight hair or curly hair and so on. How did you feel when your classmate, teacher or parent said mean things to you? Now think of a time when you called someone these names. Would they also feel the same way?

We sometimes make statements in a fun, teasing manner and do not realize the impact it has and that the other person feels bad.

Imagine your best friend walks past you in school, completely ignoring you. How do you think you would feel? You would probably feel sad or angry. You would think your friend did this because they did not care about you or were not talking to you. Switch sides and imagine that you walk past your friend without saying a hello, lost in your thoughts. What would your reasons be? Maybe you were late for class, or feeling sick with fever. You would not even imagine that your friend would think like you did because you did not do it purposely.

The problem is that we don't stop to think about the reasons why another person might have behaved in a certain way. We never try to hurt somebody intentionally, but when it comes to other people, we sometimes think they do it on purpose, which leads to fights with them.

So it is very important for us all to stop, and think about how the other person feels, and what they think before we make statements that make them feel bad or unhappy.



Activity

Instructions: Imagine that you are a part of the following situations. How do you think you would feel? Put yourself in the shoes of the characters and try to describe their feelings by drawing their feelings and write their thoughts in the empty thought bubble.

Fig. 1

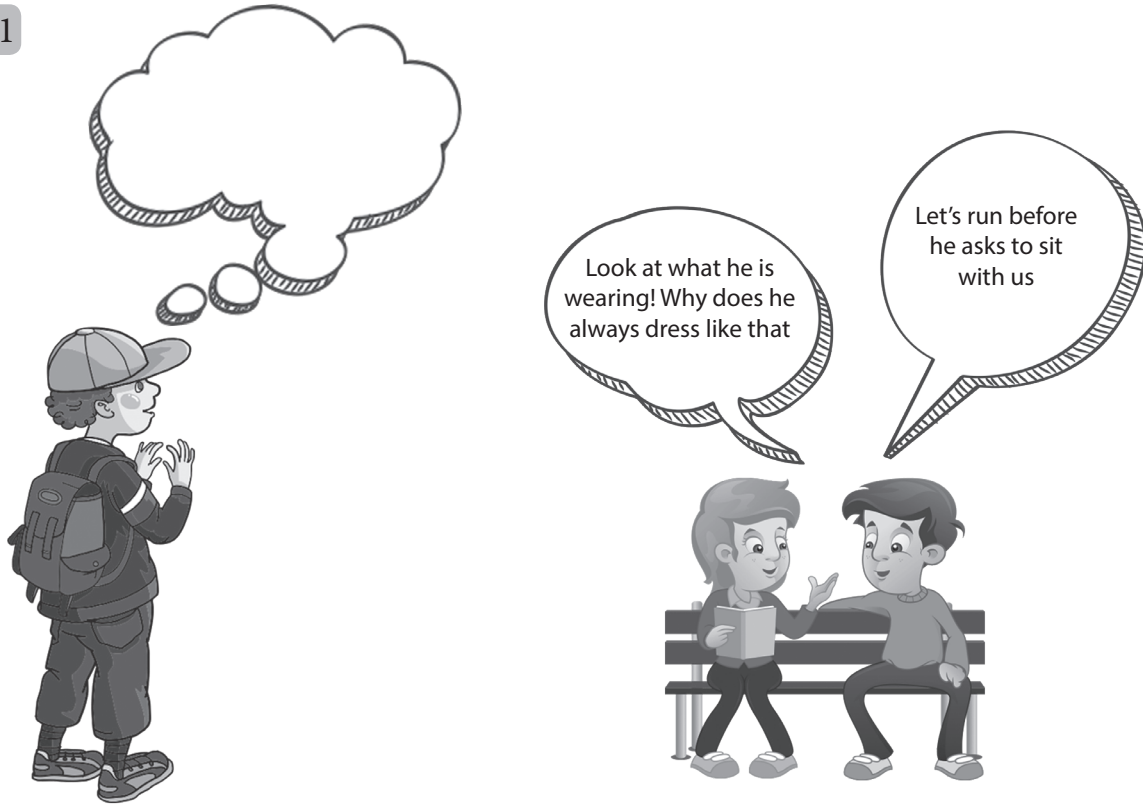
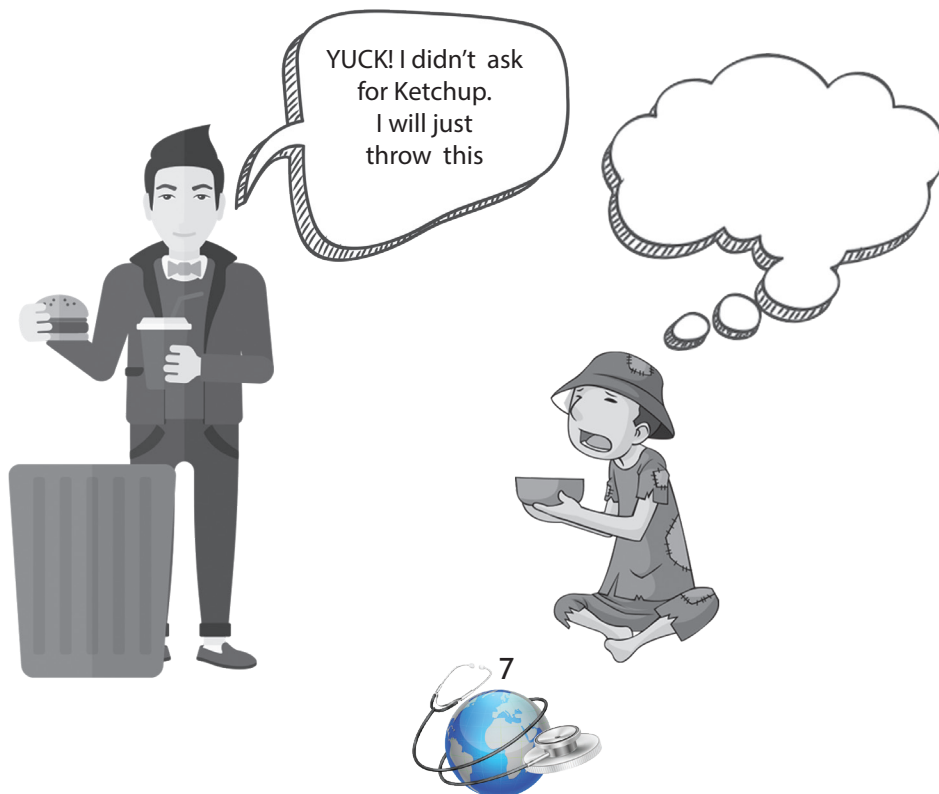


Fig. 2



Working with Others

Think about all the people you meet from the minute you wake up till you go to sleep. Your day is spent surrounded by family, classmates, team members, teachers, and others who live and work around you. In such a situation, learning how to work with others becomes crucial. It is important for us to be able to tell the people around us how we feel, what we think and what we want. This helps us create stronger relationships and also make better decisions in difficult situations. For example, telling someone our solution to a tough problem as well as being able to listen to their idea will help us come to an answer together. Working together not only makes our lives easier but also a lot more fun.

Activity

Instructions:

Do you think it is more important to study or play sports? Pick a partner and let's discuss the same.

1. Each partner is given one side of the argument (studying is more important vs. sports is more important). The goal is to defend your perspective.
2. You have 15 minutes to convince your partner to change their view
3. At the end of the activity, answer the following questions:

- How easy or difficult was it to convince your partner? _____

- Do you feel like your partner listened to what you were saying? _____

- Did you really listen to what your partner was saying? _____

- What techniques did you use to convince your partner? _____

- Which techniques worked and which ones did not? _____



- How did you feel during the activity and once it was over? _____

- Do you think your own opinion changed after hearing your partner talk? _____

Classroom Activity

Concept: To encourage students to interact and learn about each other, and understand ways in which people are similar. Doing so will foster empathy and togetherness within the group.

Instructions:

1. **Part 1:** Group Discussion – Talk about yourself to members in your group and identify ways in which you are the same, that is, hobbies, food habits, values, likes and dislikes, beliefs, to name a few.
2. **Part 2:** Group Flag – As a group, take a chart paper and create a flag that best represents the qualities of your group.

Mode: Small group (8 students)

Time: 45 minutes





THINKING SKILLS

Decision Making

All of us struggle with decisions every day, from deciding what to eat, which movie to go for, what game to play in break, to study or go out to play and if we should apologize to a friend or not. These choices are based on how we are feeling, our goals and things we want from our lives, like good friends, playing our favorite sport and doing well in exams.

It is important for us to know the result of every choice we make. It can be a mixture of both good and bad things. For example, if we decide to not apologize to our friend, she may feel angry and unhappy; but she will also understand that you are actually very hurt and therefore not repeat the same mistake. Or if you choose to play outside and not study before a big exam, you may have fun now but get low marks later which will be a bad feeling.

We must look at all our options, and have a balance between what we want now, and what we actually want later in our lives. Thus focusing on the positives and negatives of each decision, and seeing what will help us in the future are good ways to make a decision.



Instructions:

Imagine that you are stranded on an island; the only supplies available are in one boat that has washed up on the shore. Each person is allowed to take 5 items from the boat which will help you survive for 2 weeks.

1. Mosquito repellent
2. First aid kit
3. Compass
4. Water
5. Chocolate
6. Army boots
7. Book
8. Rope
9. Matchbox
10. Mattress
11. Soft drinks
12. Torch
13. Swiss Knife
14. Big plastic sheets
15. Sunscreen
16. Hats
17. Chalk
18. Water bottle
19. Whistle
20. Cell phone
21. Mp3 player
22. Batteries
23. Pillows
24. Towels
25. Soap
26. Toothbrushes and toothpaste
27. Waterproof backpack
28. Packaged food (bread, soup, noodles)
29. steel bowls
30. Plastic plates
31. Football

Which items will you pick?

Give reasons for the choice you have made and how it will help you survive.

1. _____

2. _____



3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Creative thinking

While decision making requires us to think about goals and what is good and bad for us, creative thinking is about looking at how many different ways in which things can be explored at the same time. Rather than always asking 'why', sometimes ask 'why not'.

We are always told that creativity happens only in our art class, but all the most original and exciting inventions have been created by thinkers outside of classrooms. From a time when people could only travel by road, to when someone thought of the wheel, to when someone decided that even we can fly! There can be no new findings, no progress, without creativity. To be a creative thinker means to not be scared about what other people will think of your ideas, and have the strength to talk about them and share them anyway. It is about trying and testing new ways of looking at situations, and doing things that we thought were not possible. To have the strength to make mistakes and keep trying new things again and again.

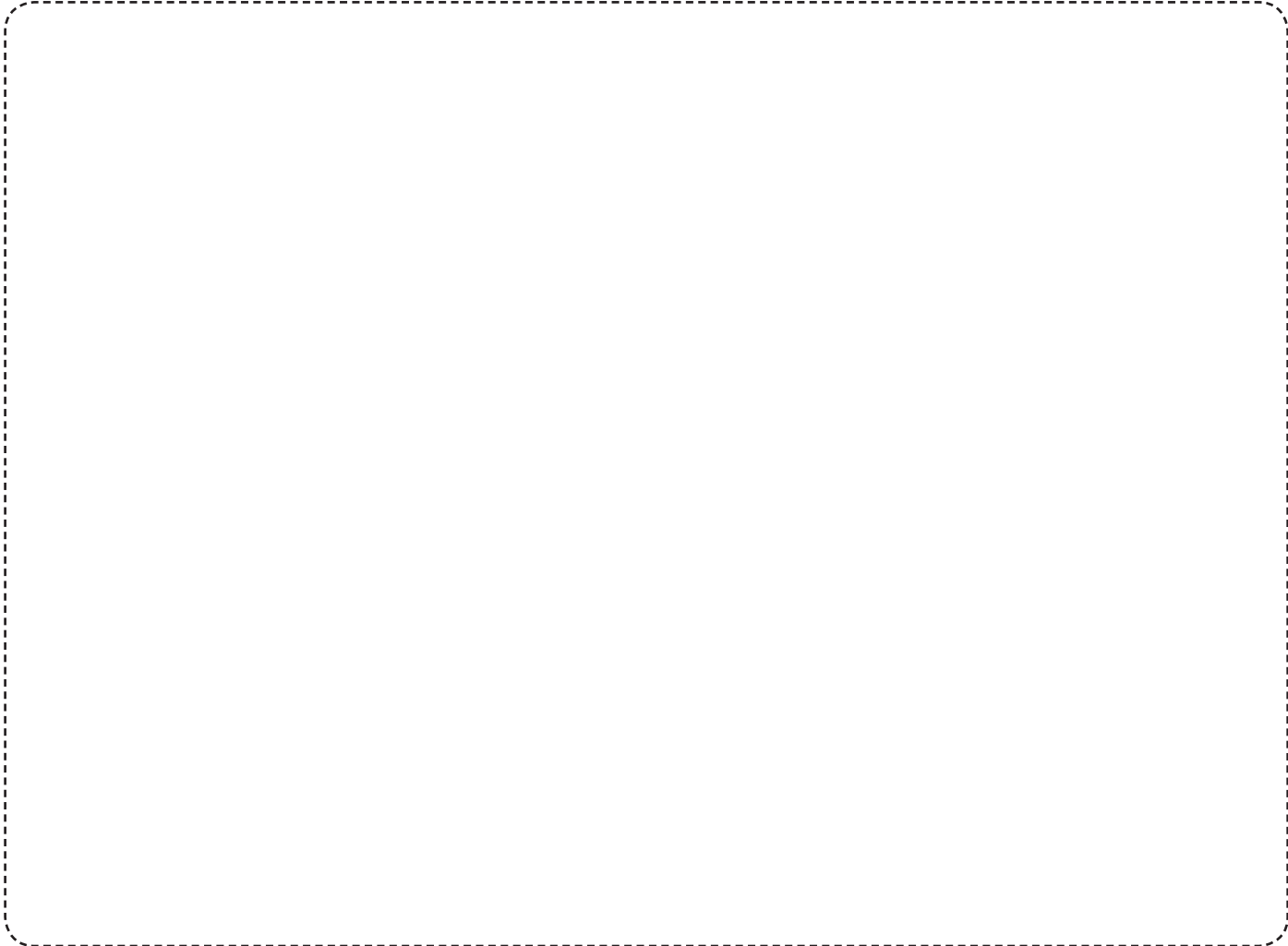
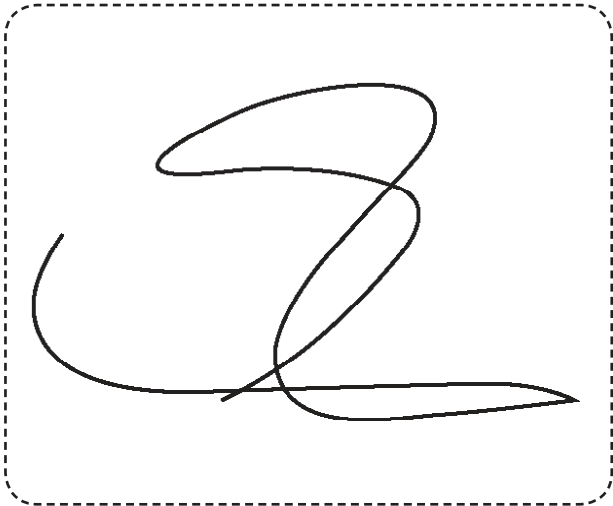
Activity

Instructions:

1. Find a partner and switch your workbook with them.
2. Put your pen at the center of the box given on the next page.
3. Close your eyes and in two seconds, without thinking, draw a random squiggle as fast as you can.
4. Now take back your own workbook
5. Create a picture using the squiggle made by your partner. Add as many lines, shapes and colours as you want to. Make sure you use the squiggle lines to make the best drawing you can.



Example:



Classroom Activity:

Concept: To help students think out of the box, and develop an attitude to make the best of the situation they are in.

Materials required:

1. Dry leaves (5)
2. Twigs and sticks (3)
3. Newspaper sheet (1)
4. Flower (1)
5. Slippers or sock- (1)

Instructions:

1. You have been given 5 items per group. Use all the given items and create a story.
2. You can use, change, cut the objects to help your group create the most creative and original story.
3. The items can be used as anything you want it to be except the item itself. For example, a flower can be used as a helicopter, umbrella or a broom but not as a flower. There are no right or wrong ideas.
4. Perform the story for the rest of the class.

Mode: Small groups (5-7 students)

Time limit: 60 minutes

FAQs

1. Isn't there always a right and wrong answer?

In some situations, like a math or science question, there is one right answer. But there are a lot of places where there is no right or wrong answer. For example, what clothes to wear for a birthday party, what to do when you grow up, what subject to choose in class 10. For all these questions the only right answer is the one that fits your choice and goals.

2. How does imagining unrealistic things help us?

We become very fixed to think of things and objects in one way, and don't look at other alternatives. But sometimes when we're in a difficult situation, the ability to think of things in a different way from how we've been taught can really help us solve problems.



3. If we make a wrong decision, can we fix it later?

Sometimes our decisions can turn out wrong, and it's difficult to fix situations after the wrong choice. Don't try to always fix the mistake yourself. If you feel like you are in trouble because of a decision, it is a good idea to ask your friends, family or teachers for help, so you have a better chance of fixing the problem.

4. Are creative thinkers good at arts and crafts?

No, creative thinking is not the same as drawing or painting. Thinking creatively means looking at situations in a creative way and finding solutions in difficult situations.

5. Who should we ask when we are confused about a choice?

There are a lot of people who give us a lot of different answers to our questions, but who should we trust? When confused, it's a good idea to ask our parents or teachers for the correct information. We should be careful when we ask our friends, because they might be as confused as we are. We should also be careful when asking strangers or looking at the internet for answers – these are not safe ways of getting information.



CASE STUDY

Ariya was a 7 year old girl studying in class 2, who was good at playing badminton and cricket. She was having problems in solving math questions but was too scared to tell her teacher or parents. And so, instead of studying for her test, she decided to spend all her time between playing outside with her friends and watching TV. Whenever her mother told her to study, she would get angry and start crying.

On the day of the test, Ariya was not able to answer most of the questions. So she asked her friend to let her see some of her answers. Her friend, Sana, was scared of getting caught, and decided to not show Ariya the answers afraid they might get caught. Ariya was angry at her best friend, and got very bad marks in math. After this her parents realized she was struggling, and Ariya was honest with them. They took out extra time to help her, and Ariya and Sana practiced together which made mathematics more fun. Ariya realized that by cheating she would have got caught later. Talking to Sana, she realized how much effort her friend had put to do well in the exam and it would not have been fair to copy all her answers. Rather than avoiding situations, she decided to always be honest about struggles.



About the Author

Dr Samir Parikh is a leading Psychiatrist and Director of the Department of Mental Health and Behavioural Sciences at Fortis Healthcare. Ms Kamna Chhibber is a Clinical Psychologist, Head-Mental Health; Ms Divya Jain is a Counselling and Sport Psychologist, Head-Psychological Services; Ms Aditi Kaul is an Art Based Therapist, Coordinator-Art Therapy Program at the Department of Mental Health and Behavioural Sciences, Fortis Healthcare.

Dr Parikh has been working extensively in the area of School Mental Health and under his aegis the Fortis School Mental Health Program is conducted across the country.

Mail ID: mentalhealth@fortishealthcare.com

Twitter: @dr_samirparikh

