



# ROLE OF TEACHERS AND PARENTS IN TEACHING LIFE SKILLS TO CHILDREN WITH MULTIPLE DISABILITIES

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## Mr. Rampal

Assistant Professor, GND University, Amritsar, Punjab,

Email:- [rampal111125@gmail.com](mailto:rampal111125@gmail.com)

## Mr. Raj Pawan

Assistant Professor, JCD PG College of Education, Sirsa, Haryana,

Email. [rajpawanj82@gmail.com](mailto:rajpawanj82@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

One of the most important jobs teacher and parents have is preparing their normal as well as special children for the day when they will leave home and enter the “real world.” When the time comes, will your children/students know how to handle **the little things** like: i) Personal care (bathing, eating, brushing, use of toilet etc.) ii) preparing meals iii) doing laundry, and what about **the bigger things** like: i) managing a home, his cloths ii) Building relationships with others iii) and tackling problems. When you think about it, being a “grown-up” is a lot of work. So how do you make sure that special kids know what to do when the time comes? This paper is focus the role of a teacher and parents in teaching life skills to children with multiple disabilities.

**Key Words:-** *Life Skill, Multiple Disabilities*

### Introduction

Life skills are the skills that children need to be eventually become successful and productive parts of their society. They are the kinds of interpersonal skills that allow them to develop meaningful relationships, as well as more reflective skills that allow them to see their actions and responses critically and become happier adults. Development of a nation depends upon the contribution of the teachers. A teacher impacts knowledge of his students, in the classroom. He guides each student to develop their potentialities. These students, later on become doctors, engineers, managers, lawyers, teacher’s etc. professionals. Thus teaching is a mother profession giving birth to several other professionals. The future of a nation is built through the process of education, hence talented, enthusiastic and learned teachers are necessary for the progress of a society and nation. “The world of tomorrow will be born from the schools today.” Thus the teacher contributes significantly towards building a strong nation.<sup>4</sup> According to Singh and Raju (2006) a teacher is a person who is directly engaged in instructing a group of students. A teacher is a person known as a guide or helper in the process of learning, in many societies, academic subjects are given priority, but teachers’ duties include instruction in craftsman ship or vocational training, spirituality civics in community roles or life skills. Teachers need to understand a subject enough to teach its essence to students. The goal is to develop a sound knowledge base on which the students will be able to build as they will be exposed to different life experiences. The passing of knowledge from generation to generation helps students to grow as an ideal member of the society. Good teachers can translate information, provide good judgment, experience and wisdom in to relevant knowledge that a student can easily understand, assimilate, retain and also pass on to others. But what if you suffered from any of a large number of physical and/or mental disabilities that prevented you from learning these skills readily? That would make you in need of what is generally called a “life skills teacher.” And although the titles and responsibilities for this job

vary from locale to locale, the basic mission of those who do the job is essentially the same: to teach those who are lacking these skills not only the skills, but handle the administrative and reporting functions of the job as well.

The students who require a life skills teacher suffer from a large number of disabilities. They are most often cognitively disabled, mentally challenged, hearing impaired, visual impaired, down syndrome, autistic, or have other problems. Regardless, they lack the skills necessary to take care of themselves and to get along in the real world. For this reason, these students are taught by life skills teachers.

Unfortunately, what often might appear as little more than “baby sitting” is actually anything but. Teaching life skills involves not only classroom teaching, but working with students in the “real world,” giving these students the skills they need to function. For example, the last time you went to a restaurant you didn’t need to be coached to look at a menu to determine what you wanted to eat and place your order with a server. You just did it. For those with many disabilities, you might just as well ask them to solve quantum physics as to order a sandwich.

### **Life Skills in the Real World**

Just as those who require the services of a life skills teacher, those who work to teach these skills are equally special. A life skills teacher not only has the knowledge and capabilities to teach others, they also have the patience of saints since it is often a matter of constant repetition to teach these basic skills to such severely disabled people.

Closely related to these tasks are the numerous reporting responsibilities that allow those who love and otherwise care for the students themselves and have an interest in their progress. Many life skills teachers work for the states in which they work. Others work for private agencies who are responsible for the care of these students. It is in these capacities that life skills teachers must recognize and report on the situations of the students under their care.

### **Teaching Life Skills**

Many students in special education need help in the following areas of self-care. Here are some ideas for teaching each skill in the classroom.

#### **Communication and social skills**

- Include daily student interaction in your lesson plans
- Get students out of the classroom and into social environments whenever possible
- Use pictures to have children point to describing their current feelings and mood

#### **Hygiene**

- Show demonstrations of personal hygiene in class
- Use social stories involving personal hygiene scenarios
- Make an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that involves personal hygiene checks throughout the day

#### **Task analysis and time management**

- Help students make calendars for personal routines
- Use check-off lists for morning activities, meals and evening activities
- Walk students through the steps of every activity in class

## Personal accountability

- Use skits and role-playing to demonstrate acceptable behavior
- Create superhero characters that embody desirable traits, write stories for them
- Encourage students to take frequent breaks in activities to express their feelings

## Respecting property

- Use name tags for personal property
- Institute borrowing system in class, where students are responsible for objects that stay in the classroom
- Visit the school library to practice respect of books and space

## Cleaning up personal spaces

- Designate time at the end of each class for clean-up
- Only allow students to move on to another activity when the current activity has been cleaned up or finished
- Use music and a cheerful tone to make clean-up fun and energetic.

## Cooking and nutrition

- Show the difference between healthy snacks and junk food
- Encourage each child to take multiple water breaks throughout the day
- Do not treat kids with candy—instead use verbal praise or play time

## Basic navigation skills

- Use school hallways to help navigate to specific rooms
- Use outdoor areas for games involving direction switches
- Encourage students to follow bus route on field trips using maps

Working in special education is rewarding, and having the right credentials can make you an extremely marketable asset in the education market.

## Teaching Daily Life Skills to Students with Special Needs: Overview & Example

Daily living skills cover many aspects of home and community functioning: these are all the skills which allow people to operate independently at home or in community settings, and to take control over their own lives. These tasks are relevant to many learner groups, including those with intellectual disabilities, and form an important part of the special ed program. Here are some examples:

- Organizing appropriate clothing for the day's activities and expected weather.
- Buying food for the week at the market or shopping center.
- Washing a load of clothes.
- Taking care of personal hygiene (showering, going to the bathroom, shaving, brushing teeth).
- Paying bills (Check this article for more on teaching money management).
- Organizing household chores (dusting, vacuuming, washing floors, cleaning the bathroom and toilet).
- Putting out trash bins on the correct day and bringing them back in again.
- Cooking a meal using a simple recipe from a cook book.

## Task Analysis for Teaching Daily Living Skills

- One of the most effective ways of teaching life skills to special needs learners is to complete a task analysis. For the life skills area, this means doing the following:

- Writing down the steps needed to complete a specific activity of daily living (for example, washing a load of clothes in the washing machine).
- Ordering the steps to complete the task in chronological order (so you can see sequentially how a task breaks up into its component parts).
- Assessing which parts of the task a student can already do in full without help.
- Assessing which parts of the task a student can do in part, or with some adult support (such as co-actively picking up clothes from the basket and placing them in an appropriate color pile).
- Teaching the stages of the task that a student cannot do prior to the teaching program beginning.
- Re-assessing and evaluating the program to check that your teaching has been effective and that learning has occurred.

This task analysis approach makes it easy to set clear goals for teaching life skills to special needs learners, and for completing follow-up evaluations and assessment tasks as needed. It also means you can make choices about appropriate goals to include in an IEP or to set as additional home based priorities with parents support.

### **Washing a Load of Clothes: A Life Skills Example**

Here's how it works for the skill of washing a load of clothing.

#### **Task stages based on task analysis:**

- Bring laundry basket to laundry.
- Take clothing out of basket and place on floor.
- Sort clothing into piles of colored and whites / near whites.
- Open washing machine.
- Place one of the piles into the machine.
- Add laundry detergent.
- Turn machine on.
- Wait until machine has finished wash cycle then open machine.
- Take clothes out and check that they have washed correctly.
- Put clothes in the dryer select the appropriate setting and then start the drier, or hang clothes on clothes line outdoors to dry.
- After the drier has completed its cycle, put clothes in the laundry basket and fold, or, if you have hung them on the line, bring clothes back inside.

As you can see, there are lots of stages in a complex task such as this one. It is important to break down the task into manageable parts, and to provide adult support as required to ensure the task is completed successfully. This life skills activity could link easily to various curriculum areas, such as English (reading tags on clothes, reading directions on washing powder, talking to others about the task), or Math (measuring detergent, reading dials and numbers on the washing machine, counting and sorting clothes, estimating space required on the line to hang out a load, timing how long it takes for a load of washing to be washed).

So you can see, if you apply the task analysis method to teaching life skills to special needs learners, you can set achievable goals and ensure your special needs learners experience success both now and in the future.

### **ROLE & RESPONSIBILITIES OF TEACHER**

A teacher has to fulfill various responsibilities, which may be summarized as follows.

1. A teacher should be expert in his subject.

2. He should be enthusiastic about teaching students.
3. Encourage co-curricular activities.
4. Encourage initiatives and creativity among the students.
5. Train the students in the life skills..
6. He should be available to the students even outside class hours.
7. Show concern for student.
8. Identify weak students and provide remedial teaching techniques.
9. He should have good communication skill.
10. He should be expert in teaching so that each and every student in the class understands clearly the subject aught.
11. He should have ability to explain difficult concepts in simple terns.
12. He should behave like a friend, philosopher and guide.
13. His behaviour should be such that the students will remember him during their lives.

### **Top 10 Traits of a Special Education Teacher**

Teachers play a critical role in the development of children. An excellent teacher can serve as an inspirational and encouraging role model for a child long after the classroom year is over. This is especially true when it comes to special education teachers who work with children dealing with diverse challenges and needs.

A highly qualified special education teacher with an advanced degree, is best suited to help children face and overcome challenges, while striving to be their personal best. Special education teachers, who set the bar, embody the following traits:

1. **Organization.** One of the core skills that will help a teacher every day in the classroom is the ability to be highly organized. The confidence of children should stem from the structure of an orderly atmosphere provided by the teacher. Some common ways that special education teachers make a classroom well organized include using color coordinated folders and baskets, labeling all important areas of the classroom, and assigning each child a communication notebook that travels from home to school and back. In addition to classroom organization, special education teachers should have organized record-keeping skills as they report to a variety of administrators to show they are up-to-date on key teaching requirements. Teachers today rely on a combination of software programs and old-fashioned pen-and-paper to keep such records.
2. **Creativity.** Everyone has a different learning style. The best teachers are able to adapt their lessons in creative ways to highlight the learning strengths of each individual child. The special education teacher must be able to include all children in the learning process, which may involve teaching the same material in four or five different ways. In order to be prepared, a teacher must call upon new teaching techniques on a regular basis.
3. **Highly intuitive.** Some children may find difficulty in properly expressing what they are feeling, due to their communication skill level. They may act out or withdraw because they are feeling confused, frustrated, or even overwhelmed. A special education teacher needs to have intuitive skills to sense underlying issues behind a child's behavior, along with helping them as situations occur.
4. **Calming nature.** The intensity of the classroom environment may also create stress. This is often magnified in a special education classroom where children may be dealing with behavioral and learning issues. A great teacher will have a calm nature to their countenance that helps reduce the level of stress in the room. Creating a safe classroom is characterized by maintaining a calm atmosphere and is a crucial skill for teachers to master.

5. **Detail-oriented.** One specific aspect of being a well-organized teacher is having the ability to pay close attention to detail. Special education teachers are consistently assessing students through formal and informal methods, where details make a difference. When applying for jobs special education teachers may notice that “attention to detail” is listed as one of the requirements for the application.
6. **Deadline-oriented.** Sticking to a clear schedule helps children stay calm by creating expectations through a daily routine. Additionally, special education teachers play an important role in a child’s goals for the year through their Individual Education Plan.
7. **Adaptability.** Teachers must be adaptable as you never know what may happen in the classroom. Children may have outbursts, meltdowns, and disruptions due to leaving the room to attend mainstream classes and meetings with therapists. A teacher has to be able to maintain order, keep to a schedule, and be flexible as all of these situations may arise. Modeling adaptability is important because children with special needs often need to learn how to adapt to their surroundings based on their disability. A teacher who demonstrates this effectively teaches the child how to do so in different situations.
8. **Even tempered.** All classroom environments can be stressful and is often heightened in special education settings where different learning situations in children may take place. Special education teachers also work closely with parents, therapists and other professionals, which can bring added stress. A great special education teacher must be even-tempered and must have excellent coping techniques.
9. **Good sense of humor.** A great special education teacher should be able to recognize the appropriate times to have a good laugh and help shift the atmosphere of the classroom to a more cheerful one. A good site to bookmark for humorous articles that special education teachers can relate to is The Lighter Side links on the *From Emotions to Advocacy* website.
10. **True love of children!** The top nine traits on this list are all very important for a special education teacher to have. However, none are as important as having a true love of children. Children instinctively know when they are loved and a teacher plays a key role in their development. It is imperative that teachers feel a genuine love and joy for children and their chosen career.

## ROLE OF PARENTS

A parent is primary helper, monitor coordinator, observes, record keeper and decision maker for the child. The most important duty of parents is to look after their children and to take interest in their welfare and progress.”Successful parenting entails both effective components in terms of commitment, empathy and positive regard for children.”<sup>16</sup>. Parenting begins during or before pregnancy and continues through a balance of lifespan. Parenthood plays a crucial role in the process of development of a child and also to the development of the society through long term investment in children.

Parents are first and lifelong teachers and guide of every child. The main task of parents in each generation is to prepare children of the next generation for the physical, social, economic and psychological situations in which the children have to survive and grow.

Parental involvement is defined as a “positive interaction between a parent and their child.” Parented involvement includes a wide range of activities but generally refers to parents and family members use and investment of resources in their children’s schooling Such investments take place in or outside of school, with an intention to improve learning of children. At home parented involvement includes such activities as helping in doing homework, reading with children, discussion about developments in school etc. Involvement at school includes parents volunteering in the classroom, attending plays, sports and other events organize by school etc. Involvement at school includes parents volunteering in the classroom, attending plays, sports and other events organized by schools. It also includes school based involvement, focused on such activities as driving on a field trip, staffing a concession booth at school games, coming to school for scheduled conferences or informal conversations, volunteering at school and serving on a parent-teacher advisory board .<sup>17</sup>



Parent involvement includes parent child interactions that communicate positive attitudes about school and importance of education to the child. “Parental involvement affects student achievement because these interactions affect students’ motivation, their sense of competence and the belief that they have control over success in school”. Parents can be involved by checking homework, communicating with the teacher and attending school functions. “When schools and families work together to support learning, every one benefits, students do better in school and in life, parents become empowered, teachers moral improves, schools get better and communities grow stronger (NCIPIE 2002).

Parents should take care to raise a well behaved child who is willing to learn , parents should provide an-encouraging home atmosphere so that child’s commitment to learn will increase Epstein (2001) has concluded that there are six types of parent involvements, which are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and community involvement. Psychologists and educators agree on the importance of early years in developing habits that are preserved by the child. A child should come to school with qualities of character that are valued by his family, school and community. “These qualities include honesty, respect caring about others, following directions of teacher and school rules, taking responsibility and making good moral choices.” The main role of parents is to provide care, love and training to their children.” “The parents’ involvement is absolutely essential to a child’s eventual success .”

### **Parents responsibilities in teaching life skills.**

Parental responsibilities can vary depending on factors such as the child's disabling condition. As a result, parental responsibilities are less clearly defined than are parental rights. However, some of the following suggestions may be helpful to ensure that your child's rights are being protected:

Develop a partnership with the school and share relevant information about your child's education and development. Ask for clarification of any aspect of the program that is unclear to you.

Make sure you understand the program specified in the IEP or IFSP before agreeing to it or signing the form. Take the IEP or IFSP form home so you can review it before you sign it. You have 10 school days in which to make a decision.

Consider and discuss with your child's teacher how your child might be included in the regular school activities program. Do not forget areas such as lunch, recess, art, music, and physical education.

**Keep records.** There may be many questions and comments about your child that you will want to discuss, as well as meetings and phone conversations you will want to remember.

Join a parent organization. In addition to giving parents an opportunity to share knowledge and gain support, a parent group can be an effective force on behalf of your child.

### **Parents become involved in the IEP or IFSP process.**

Parents of children with disabilities should be involved in the IEP or IFSP process as much as they want to be and as much as they can be.

The following suggestions can help parents become more involved:

Before attending an IEP or IFSP meeting, make a list of things you want your child to learn.

Bring any information that the school or agency may not already have to the IEP or IFSP meeting. This could include copies of medical records, past school records, and test and medical evaluation results. You can also discuss real-life examples to demonstrate your child's abilities in certain areas.

Discuss any related services your child may need. Ask each professional to describe the kind of service he or she will be providing and what improvement you might expect to see in your child as a result of these services.

Discuss methods for handling discipline problems that you know are effective with your child.

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