Life Skills Training and Its Effectiveness: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Nowadays, despite deep cultural changes and changes in lifestyle and modernism, many people lack the essential ability to cope with life's problems. This makes them vulnerable and unable to deal with the problems of everyday life. Many studies have shown that many health problems and mental-emotional disorders have psycho-social roots. Humans need to learn some skills to cope with stressful situations and struggles of life. Behavioral scientists believe that one of the most effective programs that help people have better and healthier life is life skills training program. The purpose of this program was to help people understand themselves better and have appropriate and effective interpersonal relationships, emotional control, and better management of stressful situations and solve the problems of the people. In this study, we had comprehensive review of the variety of life skills and effectiveness in order to provide strategies to improve damages within the family by a broader view.

Keywords: life skills and tolerance, teaching effectiveness, mental health

1. Introduction

Family is the smallest social unit; but it is considered as the most important social institution. This importance has several reasons: first, in terms of population, family is the most pervasive institution. No institution can be found that has as many members as family. All human beings, even those who are not married, are considered as a family member. Another reason is that in terms of time, it is a comprehensive institution; so that it encompasses the life of people from beginning to end. There would be no time that human not to be within the family. Third, family is a man training center and the center in which, there is no doubt, the destiny of man is determined; first year of life, the most important period in the formation of individuals' character and fate, is going through the family. After that, in adolescence and young adulthood, the family, plays an essential role, and then, in the establishment of a family, wife also has an important factor in determining the fate and ensuring the success (Pasandide, 1390). Forth, Community is comprised of families; hence, the fate of the community has close relation with the fate of the family. If you suppose a family, as a piece of the puzzle community and if family works well as a centre for training community, undoubtedly, in shaping society and its success, family will have a tremendous impact (Pasandide, 1390). This shows that family is one of the most important and most fundamental issues in life that we must be sensitive to them. Given the importance of the family structure, it cannot simply be passed along; and it is necessary to try and know it in order to be success. Hence, factors in the success and prosperity of the family have great importance; and this success depends on the skills of family life. One of the factors of failure of family is lack of skills required for a shared life (ibid). Today, despite deep cultural changes and changes in lifestyle and modernism, many people do not have enough ability to cope with life's problems; and this makes them vulnerable and unable to deal with the problems of everyday life. Countless studies have shown that many health problems and mental-emotional disorders have psycho-social roots. For example, many social ills such as suicide, adect, violence, delinquency behaviors and mental disorders rooted in low self-esteem, feelings of helplessness and lack of communication skills. Humans need to learn some skills to cope with stressful situations and struggles of life. Behavioral

scientists believe that one of the most effective programs that help people have better and healthier life is life skills training program. The purpose of this program is to help people understand themselves better and have appropriate and effective interpersonal relationships, emotional control, and better management of stressful situations and solve the problems of the people (Emami, 1388).

In the shadow of providing such a goal, social -mental abilities of individuals will increase. The level of mental health in the community can be raised and social damage will be prevented by enhancement of psychosocial ability of individuals in the community. Learning life skills affect the sense of oneself and others. Life skills are effective for self sufficiency, self-confidence and self-esteem; and therefore have a huge impact on the mental health of the individual. Along with the promotion of mental health, self-motivations of individual in the care of others, prevention of mental illness, prevention and treatment of health problems will be increased (Emami, 1388). It seems, with the goal of teaching life skills, promotion of mental health and prevention from damages, Study of these skills can be the first step to provide useful applications in the prevention from family damages.

2. Concepts and Literature Review

2.1 Life Skills

In 1994, the World Health Organization defines life skills as follow:

Life skills are ability for adaptive and positive behavior which the individual can effectively deal with the challenges of daily life (Tarmyan, 1378). According to Brooks (1984), life skills are learned and acquired behaviors necessary for effective life including awareness and creating the conditions for growth such behaviors (Ginter, 1999). Although the two terms of life skills and social skills both emphasize on the importance of basic development life skills; but there is a major distinction between them. Life skills are subset of social skills and include interpersonal performance which consists of two parts. Problem solving skills and having the courage are of these skills. Problem solving skills and having the courage are of these skills. Some others consider social skills in terms of visible behavior such as eye contact and verbal and nonverbal communication (Darden, Gazda, 1996). Life skills are a set of abilities that provide positive and useful adaptive and behavioral ground. These capabilities enable a person to accept its social responsibility and play their role without hurting yourself and others with desires, needs, expectations and daily problems, especially effectively in interpersonal encounters (Tarmyan, Mahjooy and Fathi, 1378).

2.2 Types of Life Skills

The World Health Organization believes that:

Teaching life skills is in the field of health promotion and increase and consists of several basic skills that include:
1. Ability to make decisions: this ability helps the individual more effectively decide on matters of life. If people actively participate in decisions making about their actions and evaluate different aspects of the choices and assess the outcome of each selection, obviously, they will be in the higher levels of mental health.
2. Problem solving ability: This capability enables individuals to more effectively solve problems in life. If life's important issues remain unresolved, mental stress can lead to physical stress.
3. Creative think ability: This type of thinking help problem-solving and decision-making. With this kind of thinking, different solutions and consequences of each problem are examined. This skill enables individuals to see things from their direct experience; even when there is no problem; and the decision is not certain; they will live with adaptability and flexibility in everyday life.
4. Critical think ability: Critical thinking is the ability to analyze information and experiences. Learning these skills will enable individuals to deal with values, pressure of groups and the media and be protected from damages.
5. Communication effectively ability: This ability helps the individuals express their opinions, beliefs, desires, needs and emotions; and when they need help, they will be able to ask for help. Skill of asking for help in case of emergency is an important factor in creating a healthy relationship.
6. Inter personal relationships: this helps individuals create positive and effective interpersonal relationships with one other. One of these cases is the ability to maintain friendly relations which has an important role in social and mental health and family warm relationships as a source of social support and cut of unhealthy social relations.
7. Self awareness ability: it is the ability to self-discovery and awareness of the traits, strengths and weaknesses, desires, fears and hatred. Growth of consciousness will help the individual find out whether s/he is under

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stress or not. This is usually a prerequisite for effective and empathic interpersonal.

8. Empathy ability: It means that the person can understand others' life even when s/he is not in their situation. Empathy helps a person accept other people, even when they are very different and respect them. Empathy improves social relations and lead to a supportive and receptive attitude toward other men leads.

9. Ability to cope with emotions: it enables the individual to recognize emotions in themselves and others. It enables the individual to know the effects of emotion and provide appropriate response to the various emotions. If emotional states such as sadness, anger or anxiety are not handled correctly, these emotions will have a negative impact on a person's physical and mental health and will have negative consequences for health.

10. Ability to cope with stress: it includes recognition of stresses of life and their impact on individual. Identifying sources of stress and how it affects humans enables individuals to reduce pressure and stress with their actions and positions (Nouri Qasem Khani & Mohammad Khani, 1377).

Brooks has been played a basic and important role in the Growth of the theory of life skills through his research that resulted in a life skills-based classification of human development. After reviewing the developmental theories related to emotional, cognitive, moral, intellectual, physical, sexual, psychological, social, cognitive, social and occupational factors, he found 305 kinds life skill in four categories which fits all ages (children, adolescents and adults) and have many applications in counseling.

Thus, according to classification of Brooks, aspects of life skills include the following:

1. The skills related to interpersonal communication / human relations
2. The skills related to problem solving / decision making
3. Skill related to fitness / healthcare
4. skills related to the identity / purpose in life

According to Brooks, these general categories are interrelated. Also, they have dynamic nature so that changes in one area and dimension can have a positive or negative effect on other areas (Ginter, 1999). Now each of these aspects will be explained in detail.

- Skills related to interpersonal communication / human relations

These types of life skills are the skills necessary for effective communication which leads to intimate relationships and facilitate relationships between small and large groups, membership and participation in society, and the interpersonal intimacy (Cadish, Glaser, Calhon & Ginter, 2001). This type of life skills includes verbal communication, nonverbal communication, participation in social activities, engaging in intimate and close relationships and expressing personal opinion. These skills are often taught early in life by parents and other family members (Pickelsmier & Hooper, 1998). An important point about interpersonal skills that in several studies have been also pointed out is social competence or emotional and affective aspect. For example, Short and Simensson (1986) found that delinquents who have a high aggressiveness are less able to understand the views of others in comparison with those who are less aggressive. Also, cognitive aspect is considered in this type of life skills.

- Skills related to problem solving / decision making
- Skills related to physical health/ healthcare
- Skills related to the identity development / purpose in life

3. Problem Solving and Decision Making Skills

If issues, difficulties and problems were less, Life would be much easier; but living without trouble and problems is just an illusion. Life is associated with problems and troubles which require competing and struggling with them. In fact, the things seen as the difficulties or problems are a real and rational face of life. It is an art to have such an ability to overcome and cope with problems and select the best solutions (Hoseiniyan, Rvaei & Qasemzade, 1388). On the other hand, problems provide a good opportunity for people to examine their lives and their relationships and try confidently to overcome their weaknesses by using their strengths. Indeed, it can be said that difficulties help people improve their social psyche. However, it should be added that people must know how to solve the problems. So, it is also said that Problem solving and decision making is one of the basic skills of life. Effective decision-making process has the following criteria:

- Pay attention to the things that are important (principle, not the minutiae)
- Pay attention to both factors intangible and tangible
- To solve the problem, it is necessary to have enough information and examine them.

– To gather the relevant information and understand them consciously.
– It is straightforward, reliable, flexible and easy to implement.

One way of solving problems and decision making with these features is to make decision whether important or unimportant; and if this method is used more and more, it will be more efficient and effective; and you will gradually become skilled in this method and will get more self-confidence. Problem-solving and decision making becomes easier as a secondary habits (Hoseinian, Rvaei and Qasemzadeh, 1388).

4. Skills Creativity

Creativity is an issue which there is no consensus among researchers and clinicians about its nature and definition. A group of psychologists know novelty and freshness as the basis of creative activities and believe that a set of special abilities and attributes must be present in the individual which will lead to creative thinking; but novelty cannot explain the complete concept of creativity, because many of the issues are new, but not creative (Emami, 1388). The problem with the definition of creativity based novelty make researchers adds value to the creative element. Thus, there are many contemporary theories which their criteria are novelty, relevance and value. Adherents of this theory believe that creativity is a process that its result is a valuable work; and it will be accepted as a useful and satisfying element at a particular time.

They considered creative thinking as a combination of sensitive and flexible creative power against the theories which enable learners to think beyond the ordinary and usual and reasonable thinking to achieve different and generating results; and it will lead to personal satisfaction and happiness of others (Emami, 1388). Other researchers confirm the current definition and also add something more to it. They believe that there should be added the creative act through exploration to novelty, relevance and value not the algorithm (The algorithm is a legitimacy action to pass in a clear and certain way in order to find answer while exploring does not have a predetermined way.

5. Effective Communication Skills

Effective communication is one of the key life skills. Effective communication makes fruitful life. The individual will feel happy. One of the characteristics of healthy and successful person is skills and ability to communicate effectively and constructively with others; and it will continue till the person is alive (Emami, 1388). Poor social communication also leads to stress and tensioning, it means that the cycle is formed that endanger group working harm to the performance of the person. An impaired social relationship can have results such as misunderstanding, uncertainty, anxiety, opacity and even anger. That means for every individual, unhappiness and dissatisfaction with work and life. In this way, the individual will gradually think that others can understand her or him or cannot get her words; and instead of being a good listener, they are usually looking for good answers or even they are ruminating about past events. So, the individual is busy with other things, simply disorder will occur in relation with others. Therefore, hasty attitudes based on numerous prejudices will affect all aspects of quality of life and disturb communications (Emami, 1388). Effective communication and interpersonal skill is one of the predictors of mental health and quality of life. That's why it is one of the most important parts of life skills.

6. Critical Thinking Skills

> "I doubt, therefore I am."

Perhaps, it can be said that we have the unique ability of thinking and by this God named us as the great creation. The ability to laugh and make laugh, ability to speak, ability to have special life and all other ability is resulted from the brain as the most complex phenomena. A look around the world shows that what causes these changes and the development of different field of life is the function of brain (cortex). All the instrumentation, discovering fire, inventing the wheel, handwriting and farming as the first development of human and the printing press, the discovery of electricity and the invention of the machine as subsequent developments and finally sophisticated technologies such as shuttle and artificial intelligence in this century have been born out of human thought (Emami, 1388).

Therefore, in terms of the importance of thinking in human life, there is no doubt; but it is possible that there is this mentality that because of our thinking nature, there is no need to foster our intellectual ability. Indeed, the goal of teaching life skills is to foster psychosocial skills that enable individuals to effectively face with the demands and struggles of life. Therefore, it is necessary for us to develop our thinking. There are different forms of human thinking objectivity which one

of its main features is critical thinking. These skills are taught us not to accept or reject everything easily and first, assess it and then accept or reject. Those who possess critical thinking skills will not be deceived and attracted by jobber groups and individuals; and they will not be involved in drugs and damages because they always think of its consequences.

7.   Stress Management Skills

Everyone has experienced stress throughout his life. The body's response to stress is what the individual wants to do or not. Sometimes, this sense is good and causes the individual become purposeful; and sometimes, the stress seems unpleasant, so that the sleep is rubbed from his eyes and he feels lonely. Family problems such as divorce, financial difficulties, domestic violence, addiction to alcohol and drug and its problem or illness and death of one of the family member can create tension in the individual; and if it is ignored, it can lead to irreparable damage to his mental and physical health. As a result, it will cause the individual to towards damages. For this reason, one of the most important skills in order to prevent from vulnerability to mental illness is stress management (Emami, 1388).

8.   Skills to Manage Emotions

Feelings and emotions are part of our nature and gives richness to our lives; if there is no emotion, there will be no vitality and exhilaration in life. Emotions play an important role in the lives of our people. Emotions play an important role in the lives of our people. These feeling make our life dynamic and it is also considered as a communication tool.

On the other hand, most of the time, close relationship between people and cut of relationship between people are resulted from the way of their emotional understanding. Of course, when we can transfer our emotion to other correctly; and we can have correct interpretation of feelings and emotions of others, our interactions with them will be more suitable. Proper attitude maturity will lead to the formation of intimate relationships. On the contrary, when we fail to express our emotion properly and understand the feelings of others, we will not have proper relation with them. Improper behavior will lead to lose emotional communication and make people away from one another.

9.   Empathy Skills

Empathy is a special kind of attention to other views. This means that by understanding the emotional reactions of others, they will show emotional reactions called empathy. Scientists believe that empathy has two components, cognitive and emotional. Cognitive components of empathy are: The ability to identify and name the other states and the ability to infer another person's perspective; and emotional component is also the ability to demonstrate emotional response (Emami, 1388).

In order to establish empathetic relationships, an individual must be able to put himself in the shoes of others, to see things from their perspective and ask himself: what would I feel, if I was in his shoes?

Requirement to do so is consciousness. When you know your own character, successes and failures and accept them, you will respect yourself as a great man. Then you can accept and respect other in the same situation as they are, with all their weaknesses and their ability. Another condition for the development of empathy between people is mutual trust. In other words, there would be empathy if people are in relationship and have unanimity, comfort and security in mind. The Trust will not be achieved except with respect to the recognition of individual differences. By the way, what are these individual differences? And how will it affect our relationship?

Differences help us understand what skills we need to seek. Attention to individual differences, accepting and respecting them is one of the most basic principles of empathic relationships with others.

10. Anger Management Skills

Anger is a feeling expressed physically and emotionally. Anger is a natural reaction of the alive. Although it is a natural feeling, but if it is not expressed adaptively, it can be harmful (Hoseinian, Ravaei and Qasemzadeh, 1388).

Usually those who do not find a suitable outlet for their anger, they might show it as signs of physical or mental illness. Some will find a way to vent their anger through abuse and aggression or resort to unhealthy habits (smoking, using drugs, alcohol, overeating, etc.). Anger, in its turn, can be a cause of stress; Daily headaches, cramps and stiffness of the shoulder and neck muscles will worsen the situation and makes it difficult for the individual to focus. In this condition a person becomes irritable and quality of life is affected.

11. Awareness Skills

Awareness is one of the effective factors for reinforcing resiliency among family members. Awareness is the most important factors that will help us have good and successful lives. Self-awareness means to know and to feel good about and satisfied with ourselves. awareness skill acquisition has an important role in promoting mental health and quality of life for each individual.

One of the components of awareness is esteem the characteristic of tolerance individuals. Self-esteem refers to a person's feelings of worthiness affected by performance, achievements, abilities, appearance and judgment of themselves. Also high self-esteem leads to self-confident which influence on good and independent decision making. On the other hand, self-esteem is one of the risk factor for tendency of people towards various damages. For having high self-esteem, one must know what makes him feel good; and then, they manage their life in the way that these types of events would not occur regularly in his life. People with self-esteem have willingness to take risks and they always attempt to carry out activities that are more valuable to them and they feel competence (Hoseinian, Ravaei and Qasemzadeh, 1388).

Awareness show the individual how he can understand his feelings and be aware of their existence; and this leads to an awareness of his own need and others' need, too. Awareness is a factor that causes our thought to turn towards our capability and positive points. Hence, it will be the origin of useful and constructive behaviors and increase the sense of responsibility.

12. Conflict Resolution Skills

Because people look at the world with a very different look and have different objectives, therefore, the conflict is inherent and inevitable in human relations. In fact, the more intimate the relationship, the greater the likelihood of interpersonal conflict (Olson and Olson, 2000, translated by Jafarinejad & Ardeshirzadeh, 1383). Once, someone jokingly said: "The main cause of divorce is marriage." Living together as a couple can be one of the most challenging issues that people face with it in their lives. The more a person knows about the other, more likely disagreement and conflict comes between them.

Perhaps, the best indication of the above is a bit of poetry:" Nothing worse than a familiar enemy". Sociologists, who have studied violence in America, say that when you're with strangers, in comparison with time that you're next to your beloved or wife, you feel greater security. Police officers of the United States reported that calls for domestic violence are of the most dangerous violence which they should respond to. An important point is that if we want our relationship remains dynamic, we should resolve the disagreement properly (Olson and Olson, 2000, translated by Jafarinejad & Ardeshirzadeh, 1383). Although conflict is statistically normal; buton the one hand, it should not lead to physical and verbal violence, and on the other hand it should not be suppressed or ignored.

Theoretical Foundations of Life Skills Training Program

The basic materials used in the teaching of life skills are the information of how we learn through observing others' behavior and its consequences; and in fact, it is based on Bandura's social learning theory (1986). Social learning theorists agree with the behaviorist perspective based on acquisition of behavior and accept that growth is influenced by the environment; but they reject machine-oriented view that behavior change is a reaction to the stimulus in which there is no thinking. Cognitive and social learning theory emphasizes the role of knowledge in development, as well role of environmental factors. We're all thoughtful creatures who have relative autonomy capabilities, not just a robot that responds to stimuli. We can think about what's going on, and evaluate it based on our responses to the assessment change (Grusec, 1992).

Albert Bandura (1995, 1986), a psychologist at Stanford University is one of the contemporary proponents of social learning theory. Bandura argues that people learn by observing and imitating the behavior of others and make it model for their own behavior. In recent years, he has developed his social learning theory and added to it the role of recognition. Bandura did not consider environmental factors as the only determinant of behavior; but he emphasized that people effects their destiny by selecting the future living environment and the goals that they pursue. Social cognitive theorists assert that people are not passive recipient of what is prepared for them, but they control environment by the way that choose to react to it. In this view, Humans are, however, shrewdly, partly responsible for creating their own environment. Different people at different stages of growth interpret their environment in the different way that cause different experience for each of them and act in it (Bandura, 1986).

13. Researches

There are a lot of studies done in the field of the effectiveness of life skill learning variables for reducing current damages and disorders in different groups of people which we will speak about the in following:

In a study by Mirzamani, Dolatshahi and Asgari (1390) on effectiveness of life skills education to reduce depressive symptoms in male high school students in Piranshahr, 62 students were randomly selected which their Depression in Children Depression scores were in the range (140 to 96). They were put in tow groups, control and experimental group; experimental group were taught life skills in 12 sessions. Results and analysis of the results showed that teaching life skills to students was effective in reducing depressive symptoms. Also, this training caused effectively to reduce social problems, preoccupation with disease and death; but, but in reducing emotional problems, feelings of guilt and increasing self-esteem and pleasure of the students had no significant effect.

Samari and La'li Farsi (1384), in the study, examined the effects of life skill teaching on family stress and social acceptance. Statistical analysis of data showed that life skill teaching will improve indices of mental health (stress, family and social acceptance) in experimental group. In the study done by Chiti (1386) in order to study effectiveness of teaching life skills to reduce symptoms of conduct disorder junior high school male students with conduct disorder, 30 students in a junior high school in Isfahan were examined by children symptom inventory based on teacher and parent forms and diagnostic interview with the assistant principal; and 15 participants were randomly put in experimental group. Data obtained from this study indicated that life skills teaching were effective in reducing symptoms of conduct disorder in the form of teachers and parents. These results emphasized effectiveness of life skills teaching after completing the follow-up phase. In the other study done by Karimi Sani and Ehyaei(1389), on the effectiveness of life skill teaching to increase self distinctive among female students of Azad university of Shabestar, 70 people who received the score less than 138 in self distinctive inventory were randomly selected and put in control group and experimental. Quasi-experimental research design was a pretest-posttest in inequalities group. The results of ANCOVA and t-tests showed that life skill teaching was effective in increasing self distinctive. Also, it was effective in reduction of emotional faulting and also mixture with others among the female students.

This study proves that students can maintain balance between emotion and cognition and between independence and dependence necessary for self distinctive and stable personal identity by learning life skill. The findings Amani and Hadi Hamadani (1389) showed that life skill method of Levinson and Gotlib (1995) is effective in increasing students' happiness. The results of study in this field is consistent with the results of other study about the effectiveness of this method in increasing joy (Levinson, Gotlib(1995) translated by Abedi(1383).

In the study of Levinson and Gotlib(1995) and Haper and Levinson(1995), the effectiveness of this method in increasing joy among families and depressed people was proved. Also, in the studies of Argaie, it was shown that parts of extrovert joy is caused by better social skills of this people especially self-assertiveness skills and their ability to cooperate. In case of the continuation of joy and happiness during time, the studies confirmed that participants were still happy till follow-up and after sometimes (Dainer, 2000, SHelroon, 2005 & Abedi, 1383).

Many studies have shown that many health problems and emotional-mental disorders are resulted from mental-social root including study about drug abuse which showed that there three factors that can cause drug abuse, weak self-esteem, inability in expressing emotion and lack of communication skill(Macdanald et al.1991).

Also, Zemermen and colleague found that there is a significant relationship between feeling of self effectiveness and success in education. Many studies have shown that there is a relationship between weak self esteem and drug and alcohol abuse (Sing & Mostafa, 1994), and misdemeanor (Docz , Lorg, 1989), sexual slovenly(Cedy, 1992) and suicide (Chocet, 1993).

In another study, Smani, Jokar and Sahragard(1386) examined the effect of tolerance on mental health and satisfaction of life. This study was done on 287 students of Shiraz University. The results showed that tolerance can cause to satisfy with life by reducing emotional problems (or increasing the level of mental health. Variable of tolerance has indirect effect on life.

Abdollahpour(1390), in the study, examined the effectiveness of life skill teaching on the change of high school students' attitude towards drug abuse. The results showed that these teachings had positive effects on high school students' attitude towards drug abuse.

Also, Azadi and Azad (1389), in the study, examined the relationship between social support, tolerance and mental health among the students of martyred families in Ilam University. The results showed that there is a significant relationship between support and mental health and social support and tolerance and tolerance and mental health.

Therefore, according to scientific evidence, in order to prevent from social damages like: suicide, addiction, violence, misdemeanor and mental disorder, it is needed to pay attention to mental health its importance.

14. Discussion and Conclusion

Life skill teaching program is provided for promotion of mental health and prevention of social damages. The hypothesis of this study is the studies done on social damages. It is aimed at providing opportunities by performing the program; the skills which help them be able to act for themselves and others and whole the society effectively and properly (Naseri, 1387).

Teaching is an issue related to learning and focus on awareness, attitudes, skill and its function to improve life and help the life of the others. Having better teaching, all around the world, will often result in better jobs and safer life. Also, teaching will provide welfare for families and societies. In one of the resolution of the World Health Organization and in Ottawa charter on promotion of health edited in 1986, on this point is focused that teaching is predetermined for health; and health is created where people live, educate, entertain and continued by them(KHalesi & Alikhani, 1382). In this study, we aimed to examine different kind of skills such as creativity, problem solving, control of anger, empathy, resolving conflicts and self-awareness. These are abilities that help us behave properly and wisely in different situation so that to communicate with other adaptively and solve problems without aggression; and in this way, we can be successful and feel happy in life.

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