

## \*Essential Life Skills

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century is placing new, more difficult demands on nation states, economies, belief systems, cultural identities, traditions, environment, contemporary life, families, and each of us. What types of skills are needed not just for survival but to thrive in the new century? What are the Essential Life Skills?

Essential Life Skills are a skill set that bring meaning and purpose to adult life by enabling us to:

- *Better understand the world in which we live*
- *Solve problems, assess and manage personal risk, make decisions*
- *Adapt quickly to change, work with others, resolve conflict*
- *Manage relationships and resources*
- *Make Meaning*

While the precise skill configuration will vary by circumstance and individual, there is a set of core skills and tools, a metaphorical Swiss Army Knife, that everyone needs. The Swiss Army Knife consists of these core skills and tools, as well as more personalized ones that are unique to person/time/place:

Applied Critical Thinking  
Multiple Literacies  
Managing the Three R's  
Accepting and Adapting to Change  
Collaborating  
Self-Regulating  
Lifelong Learning



Briefly, the core skills and tools for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century include the following.

**Applied Critical Thinking (ACT)** – ACT skills are critical thinking applied to everyday life. They consist of Systematic Questioning, Structured Problem Solving, Risk Assessment and Management, Progressive Decision-Making, and Thinking Management (metacognition).

**Multiple Literacies** – Literacies are thinking tools for perceiving and understanding the world. The one's that seem most urgent at the leading edge of this century are Basic Literacy, Adult Literacy, Health Literacy, Technology Literacy, and Environmental Literacy.

**Managing the Three R's** – The Three R's (resources, personal risks, relationships) are a kind of common denominator for adult living. To the extent they are understood and managed well our lives run more smoothly.

**Accepting and Adapting to Change** – Being able to accept and adapt to change, embrace differences and contradictions, see shades of gray, and entertain multiple realities is an evolutionary advantage.

**Collaborating** – Increasingly we are being required to engage a diverse, people-driven world. Collaborating with others, working in groups, resolving and recovering quickly from conflict are some of the demand skills of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

**Self-Regulating** – This takes two forms: *self-appraisal* (monitoring and evaluating oneself in several key areas) and *self-management* (anticipating and planning, problem solving, lifeworld corrections).

**Lifelong Learning** – Lifelong learning is no longer an option but a demand skill. In our model it takes three forms: Informational Learning, Operational Learning, and Transformational Learning. The latter involves a learning process through which adults re-frame reality, integrate knowledge and systems, redefine self, and make meaning.

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