

STEP BY STEP

Equipping Vulnerable Children for the Journey to Adulthood



This document is intended for Counsellors, Social Workers, and Caseworkers, Caregivers working with Children and Adolescents living in Child Care Institutions, Day Care Centres, and Night Care Centres.

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Documenting and implementing **Independent Living Skills (ILS)** is a critical component of age-appropriate preparation that enables children to gradually adjust and transition into a safe, dignified, and self-reliant **adulthood** under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act. The JJ Act places strong emphasis on rehabilitation, **social reintegration**, and the best interests of the child –objectives that are significantly strengthened when Independent Living Skills are systematically planned, delivered, and documented.

Proper documentation ensures **continuity of care**, accountability of duty bearers, and the provision of individualized support responsive to each child’s evolving capacities, readiness, and circumstances. When implemented in a structured and well-documented manner, ILS equips children—particularly those without family care or from highly vulnerable backgrounds—with essential life **competencies** such as responsible decision-making, financial literacy, health management, emotional regulation, and employment readiness.

At the same time, it enables institutions and stakeholders to track progress, identify gaps, and uphold every child’s right to a supported, well-prepared, and **sustainable independent life**.



When babies are born, they depend on their caregivers for virtually all of their basic needs. A newborn needs to be fed, bathed, dressed, and of course cuddled and loved. However, as most parents can attest, this **complete dependency** doesn't last long. Although children are still reliant on their caregivers in a number of ways, from a 2-year-old needing help on the potty to a 15-year-old needing yet another ride to dance practice, children are constantly developing skills that allow them to live more independently in the world around them.



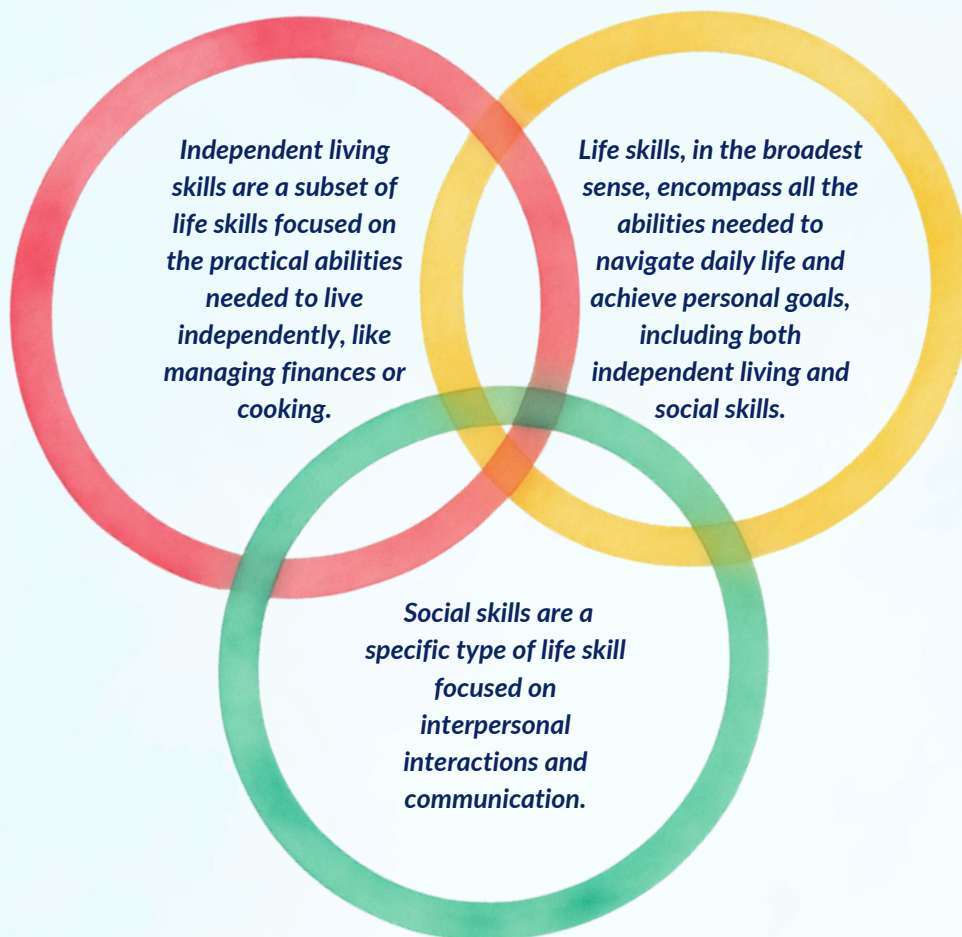
Infants learn to pick up food with their fingers and to take off their tiny socks, which they happily leave for you to find all over the house; toddlers learn to hold a spoon and use the toilet; preschoolers learn to zip their coats and to wash themselves in the bathtub. As they grow, children develop increasingly **complex skills** that allow them to eventually live independent lives.

Although some of these skills take **hands-on assistance** to practice and learn, many daily living skills are typically learned and reinforced through **observation**. For instance, a young child who sees his mother stirring some soup in a pot on the stove will copy her in play and later in his own cooking. Children watch, learn, repeat, and experiment, and take these skills with them as they grow.



Understanding the Relationship Between Life Skills, Social Skills, and Independent Living Skills

Independent living skills, social skills, and life skills are related but distinct concepts.



These skills are often interconnected and are best taught in an **integrated** manner rather than in isolation. In practice, sessions can address two or more skills together.

For example:

- Problem solving with decision making
- Time management with goal setting
- Emotion management with emotional expression
- Financial literacy with responsible decision making
- Stress management with financial planning

This integrated approach helps children understand how different skills interact in real-life situations. Following is a more detailed breakdown:

INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS

FOCUS

Practical, hands-on skills needed to manage one's own life and household without relying on others.

EXAMPLES

Cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, managing finances, using public transportation, personal hygiene, medication management, and home maintenance.

GOAL

To enable individuals to live with dignity, agency, and the highest possible level of independence, with appropriate support wherever required.

SOCIAL SKILLS

FOCUS

Abilities required for effective and appropriate interaction with others in various social situations.

EXAMPLES

Communication (verbal and non-verbal), active listening, empathy, conflict resolution, cooperation, building relationships, respect for personal boundaries, and sharing common spaces respectfully.

GOAL

To facilitate positive and healthy interactions with others, build relationships, and navigate social situations successfully.

LIFE SKILLS

FOCUS

A broad term encompassing the skills needed to cope with the challenges and demands of everyday life, both personal and social.

EXAMPLES

Responsible decision-making, problem-solving, critical thinking, self-awareness, stress management, goal-setting, emotional regulation, resilience, self-management.

GOAL

To empower individuals to live healthy, productive, and fulfilling lives.



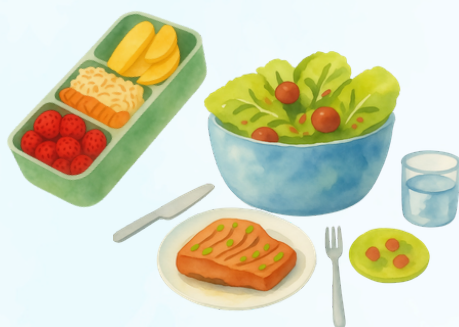
Key Independent Living Skills

1. Personal Hygiene and Grooming

Basic hygiene: brushing teeth, washing hands, bathing regularly, and maintaining personal cleanliness.

Dressing skills: choosing clothes, dressing independently, learning basic clothing care and laundry.

Toileting: reinforcing proper hygiene practices and habits.



2. Meal Preparation and Nutrition

- Basic cooking skills such as preparing simple meals.
- Understanding balanced meals, nutrition, and portion sizes.
- Safe use of kitchen appliances.
- Meal planning and budgeting for food.

3. Household Chores and Shared Living

- Cleaning and organising personal spaces.
- Laundry skills including sorting, washing, and folding clothes.
- Setting the table and cleaning up after meals.
- Learning how to share common spaces respectfully, including kitchens, bathrooms, dormitories, and study areas.





4. Money Management and Budgeting

- Recognising currency and understanding value.
- Counting money and making basic transactions.
- Budgeting and saving money.
- Responsible financial decision-making and avoiding impulsive spending.

Financial literacy sessions may also revisit related life skills such as:

- impulse control
- stress or emotional responses linked to money
- responsible spending decisions



5. Communication and Relationship Skills

- Expressing needs and feelings clearly.
- Active listening.
- Conflict resolution and respectful disagreement.
- Relationship building and maintaining healthy friendships.
- Understanding kindness, empathy, and respect for boundaries.



6. Community Skills

- Safety awareness in public spaces.
- Using public spaces and transportation safely and confidently, including understanding routes, fares, accessibility needs, help-seeking, and personal safety.
- Grocery shopping and interacting respectfully with community members.

Introduction to public institutions such as ward offices, police stations, government hospitals, and banks.

7. Health and Medication Management

- Understanding personal health needs.
- Medication management where required.
- Awareness of allergies and dietary restrictions.
- Understanding puberty, reproductive health, menstrual health, body changes, bodily autonomy, consent, and personal safety in age-appropriate ways.



9. Education and Employability Skills

- Functional literacy including filling forms and reading basic documents.
- Functional English speaking for everyday communication.
- Basic digital literacy (basic phone use, safe use of UPI and digital payments, identifying scams, filling online forms, using maps and helplines, applying for services online etc)
- Preparing CVs and job applications.
- Interview preparation and workplace behaviour.
- Understanding employment rights and responsibilities.

8. Time Management

- Planning daily routines.
- Balancing education, work, and personal responsibilities.
- Setting goals and meeting deadlines.





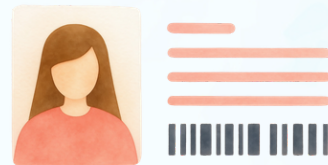
10. Safety and Protection

- Recognising unsafe situations including physical, emotional, and online risks.
- Understanding consent and personal boundaries.
- Digital safety and avoiding online exploitation.
- Knowing how and when to seek help.
- Basic First Aid (treating minor cuts, basic injury response etc)
- Emergency preparedness (fire safety, disaster response, emergency contacts etc.)

11. Self-Advocacy

Expressing Needs: Teach children how to express their needs and advocate for themselves in various situations.

Seeking Help: Encourage children to seek help when they need it and not be afraid to ask for support.



12. Civic and Legal Awareness

- Understanding rights – child rights, labour rights, gender equality, right to education.
- Accessing government schemes – knowing how to apply for ID proofs, ration cards, scholarships.
- Documentation management – keeping important documents safe and updated (Aadhaar, birth certificate, bank passbook).
- Voting & civic participation – awareness of democratic processes.

7. Emotional and Psychological Resilience

- Self-awareness – recognising feelings, strengths, and needs.
- Coping strategies – managing stress, anxiety, and change.
- Seeking help – knowing who and where to reach out for support.
- Goal setting – making realistic short- and long-term plans.



Independent Living Skills for Adolescents from Marginalised Contexts

Independent living does not mean managing without **support**. It includes knowing when to seek help, how to access services, how to build supportive relationships, and how to make **safe decisions** with guidance where needed.

Independent Living Skills should be planned and delivered through a **child centred approach** that is developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed, gender-sensitive, disability-inclusive, and responsive to the child's social, cultural, linguistic, and family context. **Skill-building** should take into account each child's age, developmental stage, abilities, communication style, lived experiences, support needs, and social context. The aim is not uniform independence, but the highest possible level of safe participation, autonomy, and **self-determination** for each child. Particular attention should be given to children facing multiple and intersecting vulnerabilities, including children with disabilities, children with histories of trauma, abuse or exploitation, children with interrupted education, children from migrant or minority communities, and adolescents who may experience exclusion on the basis of gender, sexuality, caste, language, or social identity.

ILS sessions and documentation should be **accessible** in language, format, and method, including the use of simple language, translated materials, visual aids, demonstrations, and repeated practice for children with low literacy or different communication needs.

Children and adolescents should be **involved**, as far as possible, in identifying the skills they want to strengthen, setting goals, reviewing progress, and reflecting on the support they need.

If we're talking about independent living skills for adolescents from **marginalised communities** in India, the list should ideally be both:

- Practical (for immediate survival and integration)
- Aspirational (for long-term self-reliance and dignity)

For adolescents in these contexts, the skills should address:

- Daily Life Management
- Safety and Protection
- Economic Self-reliance
- Civic Participation
- Emotional and Social Resilience
- Health Management



Disability-Inclusive Practice

Independent living skills must be adapted for children with disabilities and children requiring ongoing support. This may include:

- breaking tasks into smaller steps
- using visual aids, repetition, prompts, or role play
- using assistive devices or accessible materials
- allowing more time and repeated practice
- focusing on supported decision-making rather than forced independence
- identifying what the child can do independently, with support, or with supervision
- respecting dignity, communication style, and pace of learning





Age-Wise Skill Development Matrix

Preparation for independent living should begin early and be **built gradually** over time. Children should not be expected to acquire all skills immediately before leaving care. Transition planning should be phased, individualized, and linked to aftercare, community support, and follow-up.

AGE GROUP: 10-12 Years

CORE FOCUS: Foundational Self-Care & Social Behavior

KEY TARGETED SKILLS

- Basic personal hygiene, handwashing, and physical health routines.
- Simple household tasks (making beds, tidying personal belongings).
- Learning to share common spaces, toys, and resources respectfully.
- Expressing personal feelings, emotional needs, and physical boundaries clearly.
- Understanding basic home, institutional, and road safety rules.
- Introduction to the concept of money, saving, and avoiding wastage.
- Practicing kindness, active empathy, and basic problem-solving.

AGE GROUP: 13-15 Years

CORE FOCUS: Developing Responsibility & Self-Awareness

KEY TARGETED SKILLS

- Basic meal preparation, safe kitchen navigation, and shared household chores.
- Daily time management, balancing homework, and setting short-term goals.
- Healthy emotional expression, impulse control, and constructive anger management.
- Peer-level conflict resolution and building healthy, non-coercive relationships.
- Basic financial literacy, understanding transactional value, and micro-budgeting.
- Digital safety, recognizing online threats, cyberbullying awareness, and privacy settings.
- Broad understanding of personal rights, institutional rules, and social responsibilities.
- Building resilience and developing healthy cognitive strategies to handle setbacks.

AGE GROUP: 16-18 Years

CORE FOCUS: Preparation for Independent Adulthood & Care Transition

KEY TARGETED SKILLS

- Advanced financial literacy, banking operations, saving, and avoiding financial scams.
- Responsible, mature decision-making regarding personal safety, relationships, and finances.
- Job readiness, professional CV/resume construction, and job interview preparation.
- Functional English and local languages for daily professional and civic interactions.
- Navigating public administrative offices, understanding welfare schemes, and securing key identity documents. Independent community travel, navigation tools, and basic housing/rental awareness.
- Planning higher education, vocational tracking, or stable employment pathways.
- Managing high-stress transitions, accessing emotional support networks, and navigating life changes.



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