

SKILLS FOR LIFE

A NUTRITION EDUCATION AND FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY TRAINING GUIDE

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SKILLS FOR LIFE

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Skills for Life is a step-by-step training guide for presenting twelve (12) 5-hour education sessions to an audience of approximately 15 to 30 adults. It is designed to be useful to first-time trainers as well as to seasoned professionals. The content is tailored to lower-income adult participants, but could easily be adapted for use with any audience. A variety of “life skills” topics are covered ranging from nutrition education to financial literacy and goal setting.

The **Skills for Life** guide originated from a grant, and subsequent program, designed to improve the food security and self-sufficiency of lower-income families that were regularly using a foodbank to obtain free groceries. It was clear that many of these families could benefit from learning more about meal planning, household budgeting, problem solving and other life skills topics. The contents of **Skills for Life** evolved as the various sessions were developed and presented to program participants enrolled in the “*Community Food Club Project*”. Subsequent funding to refine, publish, and train trainers to use the guide was obtained from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Community Services.

When using the Skills for Life guide it is critical that trainers carefully review and work through activities and sessions beforehand so that modifications can be made. The guide as a whole is not copyrighted; this was intentional. It is meant to be a “working guide,” and the most effective use will occur when it is modified to the needs and characteristics of your program participants. For example, activity times given in the guide will vary based on audience and presentation. Site-specific or updated information will need to be included in some instances.

Participants ideally should be formed into an organization (hereafter referred to in the training guide as the **Club**) and each session offered to Club members on a timely basis. Under different circumstances or for less comprehensive training needs, the guide might serve as a reference with individual activities selected from the various sessions.

The primary goal of the guide is to serve as a tool for improving the food security and self-sufficiency of program participants. In the process, new opportunities may be afforded to address other participant needs. It is hoped that **Skills for Life** will be found appropriate for a variety of settings and programs. These might include brown bag clubs, food clubs, Head Start programs, halfway houses, food assistance programs, family self-sufficiency projects, adult education classes, transitional housing programs, childcare centers, and senior centers.

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Organization

The components of the guide are divided into two (2) sections. This introductory section provides an instructional overview of the guide as well as 1-page agendas for each of the twelve (12) 5-hour sessions.

The second section is divided into twelve (12) “sessions”, each representing a different 5-hour education session.

Overview: Session Components

The training guide for each of the twelve (12) sessions includes a suggested agenda, a list of required materials, objectives, and the steps necessary to achieve them. Appropriate activities are listed and described for each objective; recommended activities are highlighted in **bold**. Handouts are also provided. Each session builds on information provided in previous sessions.

The basic components of most sessions include an icebreaker activity, an overview of that session's goals and objectives, a presentation of a life skill topic, a presentation of a food and nutrition topic, a cooking demonstration, lunch, setting of personal goals/objectives, a review of material from current and previous sessions, and an optional written evaluation for use by program participants. The cooking demonstration covers the steps used to prepare that session's lunch. Participants are then given the recipe used to prepare lunch (adapted for a family of 3 to 5 people).

Suggestions for initiating an activity (*Initiator*) or making a transition from one activity to another (*Transition*) have been provided in italics in the training guide. Transitions and initiators from earlier sessions can be modified and used in later sessions; they have not been repeated throughout. Finally, the approximate time in minutes that each recommended activity will require is provided in italics at the end of that activity: for example, (*Time: 20 min.*). In the event that a recommended activity is made up of a series of smaller activities, times are provided (in bold) for these activities too. Times are not provided for most optional activities.

Maximizing the Guide’s Usefulness: The Do’s . . .

DO . . .

ADAPT ACTIVITIES AND SESSIONS. As noted, this is a “working guide.” Modifications may be required for a variety of reasons including a need for updated or more

site-specific information, time constraints, or differences in audience characteristics such as skill level and size. Trainers should always consider whether the activities and content are suited to their audience.

Particular attention must be given to the educational level of the audience. Potentially troublesome vocabulary should always be reviewed with participants prior to an activity. If activities need to be simplified, different methods can be employed. For example, instead of asking participants to generate a list, they might be given or read a list and asked to comment orally on the most important item. As well, work intended for individuals could be split up among teams. Staff and/or volunteer assistance in filling out written forms might also be helpful.

BE FLEXIBLE AND WILLING TO GIVE UP CONTROL. Activities and sessions will probably seldom go exactly as planned. Important learning may occur during spontaneous discussions unrelated to the subject matter at hand. Go into sessions with an idea of what is essential for the session and what is optional so that you are prepared to make the necessary modifications.

ENCOURAGE PARTICIPANT RETENTION. Different techniques can be used to help participants review and remember information and skills. For example, activities in the guide are sequenced to build upon each other; earlier content is constantly reviewed. Questions can be asked during sessions or informally during breaks or other times to encourage retention. Quizzes and game activities, reinforced with prizes, also encourage participation and retention.

Evaluations provide an opportunity to review both content and accomplishments. At the end of each session, goals and objectives should be reviewed with participants to verify that they were satisfactorily accomplished. A formal written evaluation can also be completed.

Other methods can be utilized that enable participants to review information outside of sessions. Tasks can be assigned to complete at home; meal preparation is one such task built into the guide. Important nutritional information might be attractively presented on index cards, encased in plastic, and hung with a magnetic clip on each participant's refrigerator. A group might be assigned the task of developing a poster with the most important nutrition information on it; the poster could then be reproduced for each participant to take home.

It is very important that participants remember and plan ahead for meeting dates. Hold meetings on the same day of each week or month so that individuals can plan easily. Give participants a calendar with Club dates marked from the first session. Check the local school calendar to help avoid scheduling conflicts. Follow-up mailings, emails, or telephone calls to participants may be needed depending on the length of time between each session.

MAKE GROUP ACTIVITIES EFFECTIVE. Most group activities and discussions in this guide are relatively brief in duration. Therefore, it is very important that they be well-directed. Tell participants what you want from them and show them how to achieve it. Give examples and write instructions down on a flipchart or other visual source. Instructions in the form of a question to be answered by the participants can be helpful. It is usually best to give instructions after participants have formed into pairs or groups to avoid confusion.

Once group work is underway, it needs to be carefully monitored. The trainer should visit the various groups and answer questions as needed. Participants will also need to be reminded about the remaining time during activities. Groups might be assigned reporters who will take notes and later report back to the large group on the small group's findings - volunteers may be helpful here.

MAKE SESSIONS EMOTIONALLY & SOCIALLY "SAFE" FOR PARTICIPANTS. Participants may feel inadequate, insecure, or socially threatened, particularly at first. They may be reluctant to share personal experiences. A "school-like atmosphere" can heighten these feelings. A variety of methods and techniques can be employed to create a safe environment that enhances learning opportunities.

Initial activities should be risk free; emphasize privacy and confidentiality. Do not threaten participants by "putting them on the spot" for answers. Encourage and assist them to answer. Providing answer choices and clues or having participants work in groups can reduce individual fears.

At the first session, discuss and establish rules or norms to guide group behavior. Some common rules are listed below. These might be modified or additional rules added during the course of the training. Post these rules in the training area and refer to them as necessary. Try to avoid a punitive or disciplinary tone.

- Personal information shared in these sessions is confidential.
- Questions can be asked anytime; there is no such thing as a stupid question.
- Participation in one form or another is expected from everyone.
- Please answer questions honestly.
- Please do not interrupt when others are speaking.
- Please attend sessions on time.

Gradually encourage participants to interact with others (e.g., assign partners). Icebreaker activities can be extremely important opportunities for participants to learn more about each other and to think about upcoming activities and topics. Specific techniques include taking a "devil's advocate" approach; making a personal disclosure or telling anecdotal stories to illustrate potential benefits; and utilizing cartoons or other visual aids.

MAKE IT FUN AND RELAXING. The Club may provide one of the few opportunities that participants have to relax, have fun, and interact with other adults. Utilize humor, diverse activities, field trips, guest speakers, and other techniques to stimulate a positive social environment.

MEET THE PHYSICAL NEEDS OF PARTICIPANTS. For example, do participants have physical disabilities? Is the location within walking distance or will they need transportation? Is room noise excessive for individuals with hearing problems? Will everyone be able to see the flipchart? How is the lighting? Will participants be comfortable in the room? If participants have children, on-site child care may need to be considered.

Participants may arrive hungry; provide drinks and snacks. Some families in the Club may also be unable to obtain sufficient quantities of food to keep their families adequately fed. Food distributions can be coordinated with cooking demonstrations. Participants learn how to prepare a meal, eat it for lunch, and then receive the ingredients so that they can prepare it later at home. If your agency does not include a food distribution program, arrange to coordinate with local emergency food providers to obtain a supply of appropriate food. Local retailers and groceries might also be contacted for donations of bread, fresh produce, or other food products.

MEET THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF PARTICIPANTS. Use self-evaluations, quizzes, or other methods to help identify or evaluate participant needs. Observation and listening skills are essential for assessment and adaptation of activities. For example, if you notice that participants have come to a session particularly tired, you might simplify activities or orient them more toward relaxation and fun.

Setting and achieving personal goals are often important to adults. Each session includes time for goal setting in order to help participants identify, plan, and set a specific personal goal. Completing activities and sessions should also be a goal. An activity checklist is provided and can be used to check off activities as they are completed. Providing notebooks or folders to maintain notes and handouts can help participants keep a record of accomplishment. Praise and reward participants for their achievement; a graduation ceremony is particularly important in this regard.

Opportunities need to be provided for participants to share knowledge and skills. Forming activity pairs or groups can be particularly effective for this purpose. The trainer can also continually solicit opinions and feedback by asking questions. Use name tags for guests and participants, and put chairs in a circular arrangement to enhance communication.

USE A VARIETY OF TECHNIQUES AND APPROACHES. Adults have different styles of learning so variety is critical. For example, provide handouts, visual aids (e.g., chalkboard, flipchart, short DVDs), physical objects (e.g., food items), and hands-on experience for

participants so that they hear, see, and touch during the learning process. Be aware of literacy and education issues. Since some participants may learn most effectively on their own outside of sessions, make supplementary materials available: for example, books on related topics such as recipes, nutrition, or exercise might be displayed and made available to sign-out.

Guest speakers can be helpful, but preparation is important for maximum benefits. Discuss what you want presented in the session with the speaker beforehand; consider providing an outline. Have participants develop questions that they want to ask during the presentation. Meet in small groups after the presentation to discuss their questions and answers; then report to the large group.

Recruiting Participants

Local health and human service agencies may be able to refer or otherwise assist you in locating prospective program participants. A fact sheet to introduce the activity to the community and to agencies might be useful. Potential agencies to contact include local foodbanks/food pantries; Community Action Agencies; Area Agencies on Aging; Head Start Programs; Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Programs; Public Housing Authorities; adult education offices at local schools; community colleges, local Departments of Social Services.

SESSION AGENDA

1

STAND UP, SIT DOWN and PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARDS

Learn more about other Club members.

OVERVIEW OF THE SESSION

CHARTING OUR COURSE

Think about topics **you** would like to learn more about at future Club meetings.

FOOD AND NUTRITION BASICS

How healthy is your diet? What are the main food groups? We will answer these questions and more.

THE COOK'S CORNER

Learn how to use English Muffins to prepare English Muffin Pizza.

LUNCH

Try it. You'll like it.

THIS IS YOUR LIFE

Set a personal goal to accomplish.

CLOSING AND EVALUATION

NEXT CLUB MEETING IS ON

SESSION AGENDA

2

YOU DON'T SAY

Learn more about Club members and win a prize!

OVERVIEW OF THE SESSION

GET WITH THE PLAN

What are the advantages of planning your meals ahead? How do you do it?

THE COOK'S CORNER

Learn how to prepare Chili Casserole and good old-fashioned Coleslaw.

LUNCH

Try it. You'll like it.

THIS IS YOUR LIFE

Set a personal goal to accomplish.

CLOSING AND EVALUATION

NEXT CLUB MEETING IS ON:

SESSION AGENDA

3

FINANCIAL TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Do you ever wonder why credit cards are easy to get?

OVERVIEW OF THE SESSION

“THE BUCK STOPS HERE”

Do you want to save money? We will discuss the steps in setting up a personal budget. You will help another family balance their budget.

THE COOK'S CORNER

Tuna is a low-cost ingredient of many tasty recipes. Learn how to prepare Tuna Casserole.

“A PENNY SAVED IS A PENNY EARNED”

Helpful hints for making your money last longer in the supermarket. How does your diet affect your food bills? How can you save money?

LUNCH

Try it. You'll like it.

THIS IS YOUR LIFE

Set a personal goal to accomplish.

CLOSING AND EVALUATION

NEXT CLUB MEETING IS ON

SESSION AGENDA

4

OVERVIEW OF THE SESSION

MONEY PITS

Do you ever wonder why Cash & Go is happy to see you?

THE COOK'S CORNER

What are some good recipes that utilize USDA commodities? Today's recipes are Pork and Scalloped Potatoes and Hiker's Snack Squares.

RECIPE DETECTIVE

What are the important parts of recipes?

HOT COMMODITIES

LUNCH

Try it. You'll like it.

THIS IS YOUR LIFE

Set a personal goal to accomplish.

CLOSING AND EVALUATION

NEXT CLUB MEETING IS ON

SESSION AGENDA

5

BARGAIN VALUES

What things and people do you value most? How does this affect the decisions that you make?

SESSION OVERVIEW

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Do you ever have problems? We will discuss the 5 basic steps that you can use to solve them.

LABEL LINGO

Most packaged foods have labels that describe their ingredients. How often do you look at labels? Do you understand all the words you see?

THE COOK'S CORNER

Mexican food is very popular in the U.S. Today's recipes are Tacos and Spicy Salsa with Corn Tortilla Chips.

LUNCH

Try it. You'll like it.

THIS IS YOUR LIFE

Set a personal goal to accomplish.

CLOSING AND EVALUATION

NEXT CLUB MEETING IS ON

SESSION AGENDA

6

DEADLY DIETS

What is your diet like? How does it compare to other Club members?

COMMUNITY RESOURCE ID

How do we use resources in the community to solve problems? Which ones have we used?

SESSION OVERVIEW

COMMUNICATION TIPS

How can we most effectively contact community resources? What do we say?

COOKING FOR HEALTHY LIVING

Tips for lowering the amount of fat, salt, and sugar in our diets. We will also discuss substitutions in recipes that can make our meals healthier.

THE COOK'S CORNER

Vegetables and fruits are key ingredients in many healthy recipes. Today we prepare Garden Stir-fry Vegetables and Cabbage Fruit Salad.

LUNCH

Try it. You'll like it.

THIS IS YOUR LIFE

Set a personal goal to accomplish.

CLOSING AND EVALUATION

NEXT CLUB MEETING IS ON

SESSION AGENDA

7

SESSION OVERVIEW

RIGHT IS MIGHT

We All Have Rights

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Do You Have Power Over Your Life?

SELF-ADVOCACY: MAKING YOUR VOICE HEARD

Explore methods of seeking information and assistance from Community Resources

THE COOK'S CORNER

Sloppy Bean Joes and Easy French Fries make up our recipes of the day.

LUNCH

Try it. You'll like it.

THIS IS YOUR LIFE

Set a personal goal to accomplish.

CLOSING AND EVALUATION

NEXT CLUB MEETING IS ON

SESSION AGENDA

8

THE GREAT COMMUNICATORS

It's not what you say, but how you say it. How can you get what you want?

SESSION OVERVIEW

THE SPICE OF LIFE

What herbs and spices do you use in your cooking? We will discuss a variety of spices and demonstrate the ways to use them.

THE COOK'S CORNER

We will show how to use spices in today's recipes as we prepare Spaghetti Sauce and Garlic Bread.

LUNCH

Try it. You'll like it.

THIS IS YOUR LIFE

Set a personal goal to accomplish.

CLOSING AND EVALUATION

NEXT CLUB MEETING IS ON

SESSION AGENDA

9

CONFLICT

What causes conflict? Why?

SESSION OVERVIEW

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Do you always agree with everyone? When you disagree, how do you handle conflicts that may occur? We will discuss tips and specific steps for solving conflicts.

FOOD SAFETY

Safe ways to handle and store foods are our topics.

THE COOK'S CORNER

Fried Rice

LUNCH

Try it. You'll like it.

THIS IS YOUR LIFE

Set a personal goal to accomplish.

CLOSING AND EVALUATION

NEXT CLUB MEETING IS ON

SESSION AGENDA

10

CHICKEN CUT-UP

One way to save money is to buy whole chickens and cut them up rather than buy separate chicken parts. Sharpen those knives and get ready . . .

‘THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGIN’

During the course of our life we go through many changes or transitions. Which ones have you experienced?

SESSION OVERVIEW

TRANSITION MANAGEMENT

Some tips and steps for managing transitions.

THE COOK'S CORNER

Today’s recipes, chicken soup and chicken salad. Have you ever wondered what to do with leftover chicken? We’ve got some other quick and easy recipes for you.

LUNCH

Try it. You'll like it.

THIS IS YOUR LIFE

Set a personal goal to accomplish.

CLOSING AND EVALUATION

NEXT CLUB MEETING IS ON

SESSION AGENDA

11

SESSION OVERVIEW

HEALTHY DIETING

How can we eat a healthier diet without giving up everything we like to eat? Is everything we hear about dieting and diets true?

FITNESS REVIEW

What exercises provide the greatest benefits? How do we work them into our daily routine?

THE COOK'S CORNER

Beans are an excellent source of protein. Our menu item today is Quick Bean and Vegetable Soup.

LUNCH

Try it. You'll like it.

THIS IS YOUR LIFE

Set a personal goal to accomplish.

CLOSING AND EVALUATION

NEXT CLUB MEETING IS ON

SESSION AGENDA

12

SESSION OVERVIEW

CLUB SESSIONS IN REVIEW

We will review previous Club sessions. Think about one thing you have learned in each.

SNACKS AND JUNK FOOD

Have you ever eaten a snack or junk food? We will talk about what's healthy and what's not.

GRADUATION CEREMONY

CELEBRATE A JOB WELL DONE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

THE COOK'S CORNER

We will prepare Pasta Salad with Tuna.

LUNCH

Try it. You'll like it.

THIS IS YOUR LIFE: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Think back over the goals you have set for yourself. What worked? What didn't? Why?

GRADUATION PARTY

CLOSING AND EVALUATION