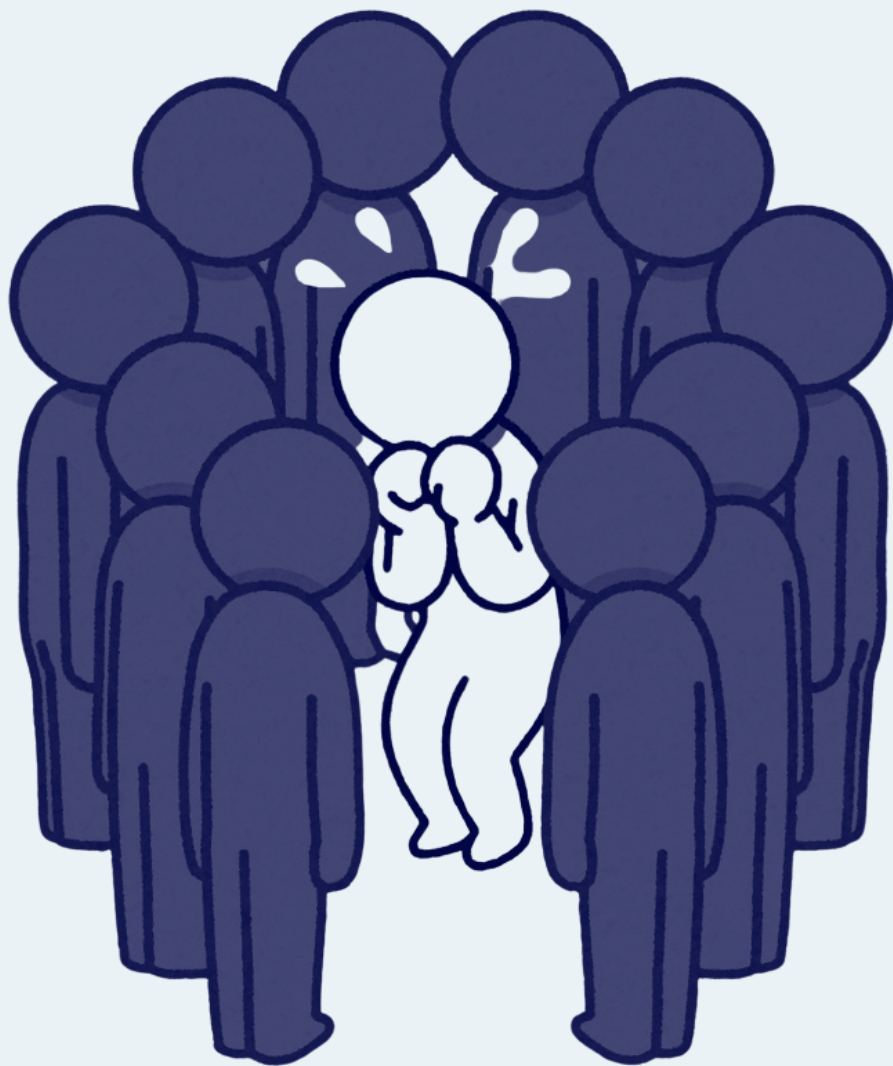


Life Skills Education

PEER PRESSURE



20 
Years of ATC



Why Life Skill Education?

Difficulties and challenges are an inevitable part of life. It is important for an individual to be able to adapt to these challenges and efficiently cope with them. For this purpose, Prerana conducts Life Skill Education sessions with all the children in its care. The sessions help to prepare the children for the realities of life by equipping them with a value system. The World Health Organization defines life skills as **"the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life"**. Life Skill Education aims to equip individuals with the necessary skill set to meet the rising needs and demands of the present society while promoting an individual's mental wellbeing.

According to the WHO, UNICEF and UNESCO the ten core life skills are: problem solving, critical thinking, effective communication skills, decision-making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness building skills, empathy, and coping with stress and emotions.

Prerana believes that education is an important tool to empower children to become independent and self-sufficient. In line with Prerana's philosophy, regular life skill education sessions were initiated in one of the Children's Homes that we work with. These sessions covered a range of skills such as effective communication, decision making, self-awareness and maintaining healthy interpersonal relations.

Rationale for Session

Often individuals in order to be accepted by those around them would be willing to abandon their previously learned values, norms, attitudes and behaviors and instead adopt those similar to their existing social circle. This process of transmitting group norms and encouraging group conformity is called peer pressure. The facilitator had observed the existence of smaller groups among the residents of the Home. These groups often engaged in subtle forms of hostility towards each other such as eye rolling, passing unkind comments about one another, among others. Thus, to address these behaviors and encourage healthier interpersonal relations among residents, a session on peer pressure was facilitated. It has been discussed in detail below.

Life skill education session: Understanding Peer Pressure

Number of participants: 19

Age group: 12 - 17 years (all girls)

Aim: To build an understanding of the process of peer pressure and how affects individuals

The facilitator began the session with the activity **'recruiting game'**.

The Recruiting Game

The activity can be conducted with a group of five or more participants. At the start of the activity, the facilitator identifies two individuals from the group who are given a specific task to complete. For example, one individual can be given the task of gardening while the other can be given the task of cooking. These individuals must convince the remaining members and 'recruit' them in their respective teams to complete the given task. In case the other participants do not wish to join a team, they must also explain the reason for the same. As more team members join the team, they must assist the 'recruiter' in recruiting other participants.

Based on her previous observations, the facilitator identified two girls from the same friend circle. The facilitator explained the instructions of the activity and gave the girls the task of cooking and washing clothes respectively. As the activity began, the facilitator observed that each 'recruiter' chose one section of the room for their respective team. It was noticed that the 'recruiters' informed, commanded or physically pulled the other girls to join their respective teams rather than verbally convince them. As the activity progressed, the 'recruiter' also became the gatekeeper to prevent the existing members from leaving their teams. As gatekeepers, the recruiters threatened or physically prevented them from leaving. The facilitator ended the activity once eight members had joined one team.



The activity has to be done tactfully as if it is not moderated well has the potential for becoming physically aggressive. Assertive reiteration of using verbal means to 'recruit' rather than physical means may reduce the possibility of aggressive responses. Good rapport between the facilitator and the participants may also assist in moderating the session to run smoothly. For the activity to be successful, it is essential that the recruiters are not from the same friend group. Thus, it is recommended that the facilitator have some understanding of the existing group dynamics prior to facilitating the session. This will enable the facilitator to not only choose the 'recruiters' well but also understand how the process of recruitment takes place among close friends and known associates.

The activity closely resembles the process of recruitment for victims of trafficking. Many times, traffickers tend to be people who the victims trust. Traffickers often tend to lure victims by offering 'opportunities' for earning money. Since the victims consider them as 'friends' or 'trustworthy', they agree to their proposals. Once victims are entrapped within the trade, traffickers may also become the gatekeepers who through commands, threats and physical violence ensure that the victims remain trapped.

At the end of activity, the facilitator asked the team members what task was allotted to their respective teams. Except the 'recruiters', none of the girls were aware that there had been any task allotment. The facilitator wondered on what basis did the girls join their respective teams. Many girls stated that friendship was an important criterion for selecting a particular team. They explained that either their 'recruiter' was a close friend or the fellow team members were their close friends. It was an important point raised by the girls and the facilitator asked the girls to reflect on whether one should blindly follow friends into tasks. Most of the girls shared that they would not blindly follow their friends in every task but would prefer working with friends as much as possible as it lessens the burden of the task and makes the activity more enjoyable. The facilitator used this as an opportunity to initiate a discussion on understanding peer pressure.

The facilitator explained that there are two types of pressure – the direct, explicit pressure such as commands and threats, and the indirect, implicit pressure such as fear that we would lose support if we do not agree to do the task. The facilitator further explained that due to such a pressure we often tend to behave in a specific manner which may not always be beneficial. Through self-disclosure, the facilitator shared an experience peer pressure and the subsequent distressing feelings of anger and shame. Building on it, the facilitator asked the girls to reflect on how they would respond to such a situation. Many girls stated that they would have assertively said 'no'. However one girl pointed out that saying no can become difficult if a close friend or a known person is involved. The facilitator appreciated the girls for their input and added to their strategies by encouraging them to seek out friends with whom they share mutual interests, have trusted adults among others.

Subsequently, the facilitator used these inputs to explain the process of discrimination and its adverse effects on an individual. Through the technique of self disclosure, the facilitator shared some of her personal experiences of being discriminated against as well as its negative effect on her self-esteem and personal relations. Some of the girls also shared their personal experiences of being discriminated against. One of the girls shared that due to speech difficulties not many girls would include her in activities. The facilitator appreciated the girls for sharing their stories and acknowledged their feelings of distress. The facilitator also encouraged the girls to be mindful of the direct and subtle forms of discrimination around them and to reflect on the action they would like to take in such a situation.

The session could be further enriched through detailed and interactive discussions on concepts of choice, consent, safety and building healthier boundaries. It is recommended that the facilitator conduct sessions on these topics prior to the current session and cull out important points from them to interweave it with the current discussion. Nevertheless, the facilitator should reiterate the concept of bodily autonomy, which states that every individual has ownership over their body and therefore has the right to self-determine.

The facilitator could also initiate a discussion on the importance of being presented with choices and having the right to accept or reject them. Along with the discussion on choice and consent, it is essential that participants are also aware of and equipped with the means to build healthy boundaries to ensure their safety.

Through this session and its discussions, we aim for our participants to be aware that although pressure comes in direct and indirect forms. Most often, the pressure we face comes in subtle forms from known individuals and is difficult to resist. Furthermore, relationships and associations may be incorrectly used as basis to compel one's behavior. However, one can be equipped to work through this pressure by being aware of our right to have choices and to choose accordingly. Although some choices may be harder than others, their impact can be lessened by setting healthy boundaries with others and having healthy relationships with oneself. The identity of an individual consists of numerous aspects, therefore the loss of one can be buffered by other activities such as extracurricular, family support among others.

The session can be modified and its purview can be extended to parents, caregivers and other stakeholders playing an integral role in the growth of children. The session can assist the stakeholders in building an empathetic understanding of the pressure faced by children and individuals through known and unknown others.

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