

Building Health Skills

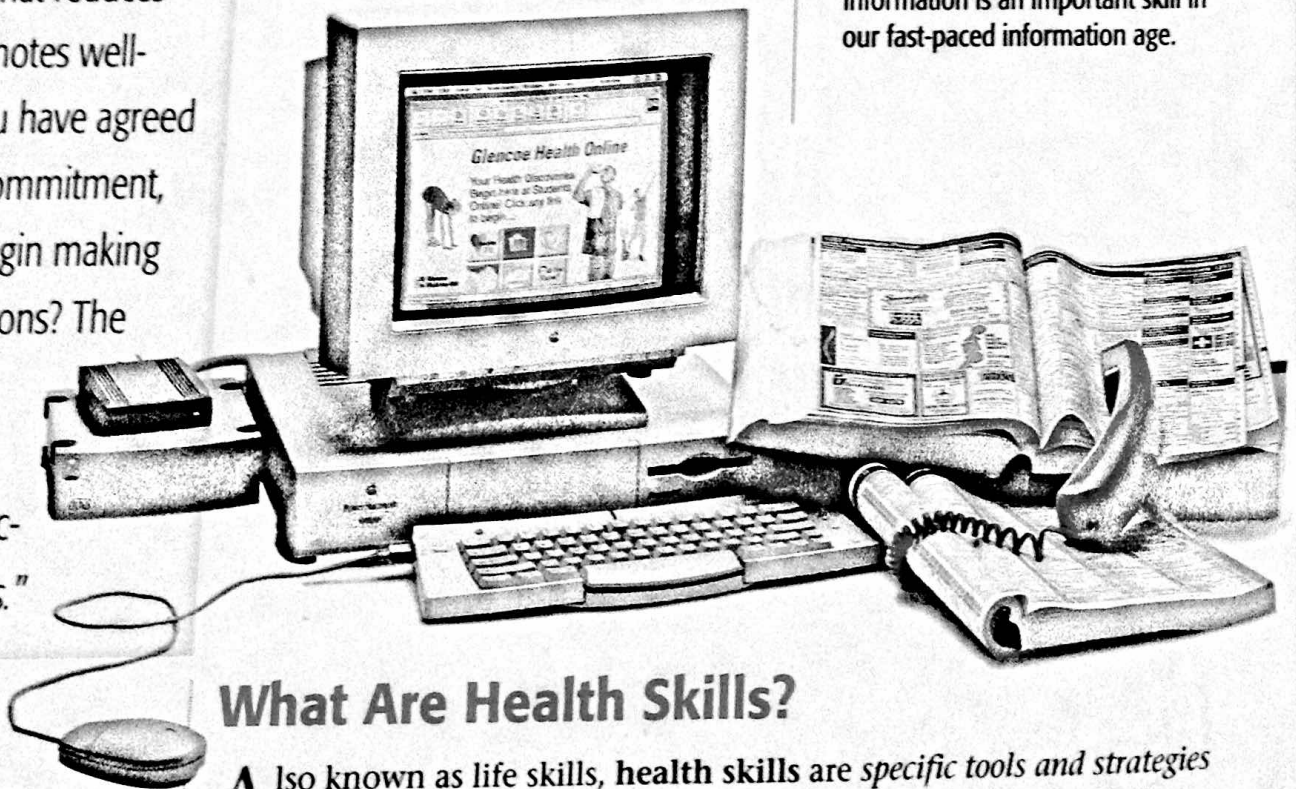
Taking responsibility for your health begins with a commitment to take charge of your actions and behaviors in a way that reduces risks and promotes wellness. Once you have agreed to make this commitment, how do you begin making informed decisions? The answer to this question is "by learning and practicing health skills."

HEALTH TERMS

health skills
communication
refusal skills
self-esteem
stress

HEALTH CONCEPTS

- Developing good communication and building self-esteem are health skills central to achieving total health and wellness.
- Learning to evaluate messages from the various media can help you make informed, healthful choices.
- Learning to obtain and evaluate information is an important skill in our fast-paced information age.



What Are Health Skills?

Also known as life skills, **health skills** are *specific tools and strategies that lead to better and more informed health choices*. Health skills are for use not just now, during your teen years, but throughout your entire life. As with other skills you may have mastered, developing health skills takes time and practice. The immediate and long-term benefits to your physical, social, and mental/emotional health, however, make the effort worthwhile.

Social Health Skills

One of the traits of being a health literate person is being an effective communicator. Communicating effectively means being able

to express your knowledge, beliefs, and ideas in many different ways and forms. It also includes the ability to say no to behaviors that threaten your health and well-being. Learning and applying these two skills—communicating and saying no—are essential to good social health.

Communication Skills

You may not think of communicating as a skill. You may be saying to yourself, “I already *know* how to communicate”—but do you? If, in a heated moment, you and a friend shout at each other so loudly that neither of you hears the other, are you communicating? Obviously, there is more to communication than just words. In its deeper sense, **communication** is *a process through which you send messages to and receive messages from others*. Effective communication involves not only making yourself heard but also being a good listener.

The skill of communicating, which is explored more fully in Chapter 11, includes the following:

- **Clearly say what you mean.**
- **Pay attention to *how* you say something.**
- **Be a good listener.**
- **Be aware of your facial expressions and gestures.**

▼ **Good communication requires good listening skills.**

ACTIVITY Name three features of a good listener.

Refusal Skills

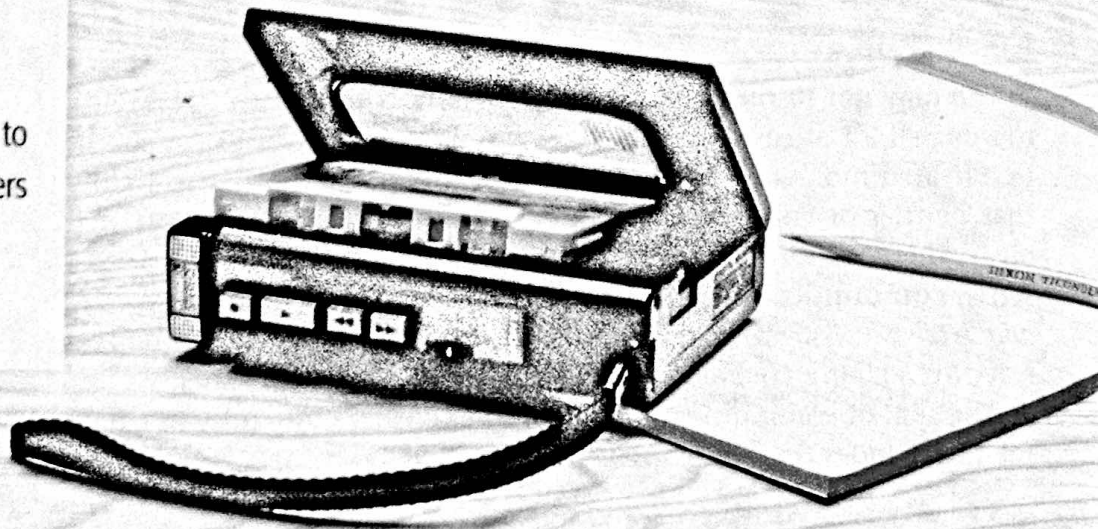
Spending time with people who share the same likes and interests, especially during the teen years, is important to your social development. It is equally important to know when another person’s needs and desires conflict with your own. Picture a situation where you are asked to do something that compromises your values or that you know or believe is wrong. This may be a high-risk behavior, such as not wearing seat belts, smoking cigarettes, or using alcohol or other drugs.

In such circumstances, a knowledge of refusal skills is vital. **Refusal skills** are *techniques that can help you refuse when you are urged to take part in unsafe or unhealthful behaviors*. This strategy includes the following:

1. **Say no.** Do this calmly at first. Use an expression such as “Sorry, I don’t want to” or “I’d rather not.”
2. **Explain why you are refusing.** State your feelings. Tell the other person that the suggested activity or behavior goes against your values or beliefs.



When you communicate, is it through words only? What other methods might you use to express yourself? How do others interpret what you say? In this activity, you will find out.



3. **Suggest alternatives to the proposed activity.** Give a list of safe, healthful activities. Speak calmly.
4. **Back up your words using body language.** Make it clear that you don't intend to back down from your position. Look directly into the other person's eyes.
5. **Leave if necessary.** If the other person continues to put pressure on you, or simply won't take no for an answer, just walk away. Carry money in case you have to call for a ride or take a taxi.

Mental and Emotional Health Skills

Another trait of a health-literate person is being a responsible, productive citizen. This means, in part, respecting yourself and others. Doing this is sometimes easier said than done, especially during the teen years. Two health skills, building **self-esteem** and managing **stress**, can help restore perspective and give you the emotional boost you need during these years.

Building Self-Esteem

Think of five words that describe your personality and characteristics. How many of these words paint a positive picture? How many are based on how others see you? How many are based on how you see yourself? Your answers provide a window on your level of self-esteem. **Self-esteem** is *the confidence and worth that you feel about*

h t link

self-esteem For more information on self-esteem and its role in good mental health, see Chapter 8, page 188.

stress For more information on stress and strategies for managing stress, see Chapter 9, page 214.

What you will need

- Paper and pencil
- Portable audio tape recorder

What you will do

1. Write down a question of five to ten words. Make it the sort heard in everyday conversation. Examples might include "Would you please hand me that pencil?" or "Why don't you have a seat?"
2. Practice reading the sentence aloud. Each time you read it, emphasize or stress a different word. For example: "Why don't

you have a seat?" and "Why don't you have a seat?" Make a recording of yourself saying the sentence five different ways.

3. Find several volunteers to take part in your experiment. Ask each to number a sheet of paper from 1 to 5. Play back a recording of your reading of the sentence the first way, then stop the tape player.
4. Instruct the respondents to write a feeling or attitude they hear in the voice of the speaker. Proceed in a similar fashion for each of the remaining versions of the sentence.

In conclusion

1. How many different emotions did respondents detect in the readings of the sentence? Did the respondents agree in their reactions?
2. Which readings were perceived as sounding negative? Which were seen as positive?
3. What other nonverbal clues can you think of that influence the act of communicating?

yourself. Self-esteem affects everything you do, think, feel, and are. A strategy for building or improving self-esteem includes:

- **Examining the messages you send yourself.** Are you one of your own worst critics? If so, stop sending yourself negative messages. If you need to improve in a given area, don't put yourself down. Instead, find a positive way to state your goals.
- **Focusing on the things you do well.** Think about past successes you've had. This will gradually help you build more opportunities for success and expand the range of things you are good at doing.

Stress Management Skills

Your ride to school is late, making *you* late. In class, you realize your history project is due in two days. Situations like these are sources of **stress**, *the body's and mind's reactions to everyday demands*. Stress is an unavoidable part of life. However, when stress threatens to become overwhelming, there *are* solutions. These include:

- **Rechanneling your energy.** Redirect all the pent-up negative energy you are feeling into something positive. Work out your frustrations through physical activity.
- **Relaxing.** Take it easy after a hard day. Try listening to soothing music or taking a warm bath.
- **Laughing.** When things get tough, the tough get laughing. Tune in to your favorite TV sitcom, open a favorite joke book, or get together with friends with whom you have a good time.

Accessing Reliable Health Information On-Line

You are in the midst of a digital revolution that is making health information available to anyone with a modem and a connection to the Internet. Just about any health topic, from sunburn to stroke, is a mouse click away.

Is all the information on the World Wide Web equally reliable? According to Dr. George Lundberg, editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, the answer is a resounding *no*. Some information, he warns, is posted on the Internet by un reputable sources that at best have no medical value and at worst can be dangerous to your health.

Mindful of this problem, the U. S. government has added its own home page to the Net. Titled "Healthfinder," the page provides links to hundreds of health-related sites that have been screened for accuracy. The Healthfinder site also enables users to reach state health departments, support organizations, and non-profit health groups.



Total Health Skills

Another trait of a health-literate person is being a self-directed learner—having the ability to gather and use reliable health information. Mastering this skill, and seeking help when you have a problem, can benefit your total health and well-being. Developing an awareness of illness symptoms and staying up-to-date on medical research are habits that can actually help prolong your life.

Accessing Reliable Information

You live in an information age. With the wealth of messages you receive—some are conflicting—how can you tell what to believe and what to disregard? The following strategies can help:

- **Consider the source.** Pay attention to the reputation of a given media source. Is the source widely considered a "popularizer" of fad information or a legitimate provider of documented facts?
- **Consider the "angle."** Are advertisements for products that are "guaranteed to make you look and feel better" as reliable as newspaper reports on health advances? Of course not. When evaluating a media source, ask yourself, "Are the publishers of this information trying to sell me something? Do they have my best interests in mind?" When advisable, proceed with caution.

Getting Help

Meeting life's demands means facing problems when they arise. When the problems are big, this means being able to reach out and ask for help. When you need help with a problem:

- **Think of people in your life who can offer assistance.** You might turn to a parent, a teacher, a counselor, or a religious leader. Keep a list of such names handy for times when you may need it.
- **Learn about resources in your community.** Many communities offer resources and outreach services for people in need. Many of these can be located in the Yellow Pages of your local phone directory. A health professional in your school may be able to recommend others.
- **Learn about print and electronic resources.** Sometimes, help is only a mouse click away. Yet, caution is needed, especially when using the Internet in search of help. A good starting point for reliable information is Glencoe's Health Web site, which may be found at: health.glencoe.com.



Stay Safe in Cyberspace

Beware! There are many ways that information about you can be stored, shared, or sold on the Internet:

- Avoid giving out personal information such as your name, gender, age, interests, phone number, street address, e-mail address, family credit card numbers, or social security number to anyone.
- Don't include personal information in a personal home page.
- Stay away from discussion logs, which may keep records of your conversations or opinions for years afterward.

LESSON

1

Review

Reviewing Facts and Vocabulary

1. Write a paragraph that includes the terms *communication* and *stress*. The first time each of these terms is mentioned, define it in your own words.
2. Divide a sheet of paper into two columns. Label one column *Mental and Emotional Health* and one *Social Health*. Write in the appropriate column the name of a health skill covered in the lesson. Then identify Total Health skills.

Thinking Critically

3. **Analyzing.** Think about your hobbies, pastimes, and other activities you enjoy doing. Describe specific ways in which the activities you named might be used as emotional outlets when you experience stress.
4. **Synthesizing.** Aldo, a freshman, has just become a member of his school's

track team. Today in the locker room just before practice, two of the older members of the team offered Aldo a pill that they said would improve his time in the 100-meter dash. Aldo has heard bad things about such pills and does not want to take chances with his health. Explain in detail the steps Aldo can take to refuse the offer.

Applying Health Skills

5. **In Your Home and School.** In your private Health Journal, make a list of adults at home and at school that you could approach if you had a problem. Next to each name, write special qualities that make the person a good source of help (e.g., is a good listener, has 25 years of experience helping teens with troubles).