

Welcome to the Life Skills Center

Dear Life Skills Center Youth and Families,

Welcome to the Life Skills Center! Thank you for joining us for this next step in your treatment.

The Life Skills Center is a highly structured and supportive therapeutic program for adolescents who are presenting with major mental illness and experiencing disruptions in their home, school, or community.

Our program offers therapeutic groups and milieu activities based on best practices to help you identify and gain insight into their thoughts, emotions, and behavioral patterns. At Life Skills, you will work to develop more effective ways of coping, improve your self-esteem, and enhance social skills in order to live and function safely and successfully at home, in school, and in the community.

The Life Skills Center offers a small client-to-staff ratio with a focus on community and wellbeing that is essential for effective group work. We endeavor to deliver treatment that is responsive to the individual needs and choices of the youth and families we serve. We will work collaboratively with your family, providers, schools, and community-supports to integrate into your existing support systems in order keep you at the center of care.

As a service of Riverside Community Care, Life Skills Center is part of a range of services dedicated to helping youth and families succeed, including outpatient therapy, early childhood services, home based services, and care coordination services. Riverside Community Care is a community-based non-profit organization serving more than 40,000 people a year through a wide range of mental healthcare, developmental and brain injury services, early childhood and youth programs, addiction treatment, trauma response, and more. We are here to make a difference in the lives of individuals, families, and communities through innovative and compassionate behavioral healthcare and human services.

This Handbook is intended to help you to familiarize yourself with our program and to utilize as a resource throughout your treatment. Our staff will review the Handbook with you at intake and we are available to answer any additional questions you may have.

Sincerely,

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About the Riverside Life Skills Centers

Riverside Life Skills Centers are located in Milford, Needham, and Somerville, Massachusetts and are designed to accommodate adolescents (ages 12-18) with significant mental health challenges who are experiencing disruptions in their home, school, and/or community. Our goal is to help adolescents develop sustainable skills and insight to live and function safely and successfully at home, in school, and in the community.

Youth enrolled at Life Skills often internalize their symptoms and commonly experience challenges such as inability to access education, self-injurious behaviors, and suicidal ideation/attempts. Common diagnoses include, but are not limited to: Depressive Disorders, Anxiety Disorders, Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders, Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders, Attention-Deficit Disorders, and Schizophrenia Spectrum Disorders.

We provide a welcoming, therapeutic space for LGBTQIA+ adolescents and for adolescents exploring their identities. Riverside Life Skills Centers are committed to creating and sustaining a safe, respectful, and welcoming environment for all members of our community.

Upon entering Life Skills, every adolescent and family participate in a comprehensive assessment process with their clinician. Through this evaluation process, we build an individualized treatment plan that addresses and builds upon each adolescent's strengths and needs. Enrollment and treatment at Life Skills are voluntary. Youth committed to engaging in the treatment process have demonstrated significant progress in the areas of accessing their education, building interpersonal skills, and engaging in their community.

Through our highly structured clinical environment, involving therapeutic groups and activities, adolescents learn how to identify and understand their behavior patterns and gain insight into their mental health and psychiatric symptoms. They develop skills and strategies to manage symptoms and enhance their daily lives, including social skills, distress tolerance, self-esteem, and conflict resolution. Through their group and individual work, adolescents at Life Skills learn more effective ways of coping with overwhelming emotions and interpersonal challenges skills to integrate more effectively into their school and home communities.

Clinical Supports

Primary Clinician

Every youth enrolled at Life Skills is assigned a primary master's level clinician who coordinates their goals and treatment in program. Each youth and their family will work with their clinician to complete a comprehensive assessment and develop an Individualized Action Plan to outline the course of treatment and establish attainable goals. Clinicians will also collaborate with community agencies and providers to assist in meeting the individual needs of the adolescent.

Group and Milieu Therapy

The Life Skills Centers offer strengths-based group and milieu therapy model to help teens process and manage the challenges that they face. Our clinical staff provides group counseling using evidence-based strategies. Treatment modalities include, but are not limited to: Dialectical Behavioral Therapy,

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, trauma-informed care, social-skill building, expressive arts therapy, stress and anger management, and problem-solving skills.

Family Supports

We view the family as an essential part of treatment. Families are involved in the assessment and goal-development processes. Throughout treatment there is ongoing communication between families and clinical staff. Families may also participate in family meetings as needed.

Academic Supports

Many of the youth who come to Life Skills have struggled to manage the academic and social stressors at school. We support teens and families to work with their school around an appropriate academic plan during their treatment at Life Skills and to build a sustainable transition plan as discharge approaches. For teens who experience school-related challenges, we work collaboratively to identify what they need to manage academic demands more effectively in order to experience success in school. Teens work to build healthy coping skills they can utilize in a school environment and to develop skills to advocate for the ongoing supports they need to manage school demands.

While our schedule includes Study Hall periods for teens to complete assignments, Life Skills does not provide academic instruction.

Collaboration

Our clinical staff work with existing service providers to provide successful and collaborative continuity of care, including individual therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, schools, the Department of Mental Health, and the Department of Children and Families.

Funding and Enrollment

Life Skills Centers are funded by the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH). Youth who are already enrolled in DMH services can submit a Life Skills Center application to DMH for approval. Youth who are not enrolled in DMH services must submit a DMH application with their Life Skills Center application to DMH to be considered for services. Additional information can be found on the first page of the Life Skills application.

Applicants to Life Skills must be 18 years of age or younger at the time of application and have a mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder that substantially interferes with or limits their functioning at home, in school, or in their community.

Life Skills Center is a voluntary program. Prior to enrollment, and throughout participation in Life Skills, adolescents agree to follow program expectations and engage in the treatment process. Youth unwilling to do so will not be considered for enrollment.

Therapeutic Group Descriptions

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Dialectical Behavior Therapy Groups
Coping with Conflict: A CBT based group that helps teens connect thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and develop appropriate skills to manage them.
Stress Less: A DBT based group where teens discuss their levels of stress and identify positive ways of managing stress, including using and discussing stress management and relaxation exercises and various coping strategies.
Y-CBT: A CBT based group combined with Kundalini yoga, which focuses on mindfulness and meditation to cope with anxiety, depression, and anger management. Teens learn how to self-regulate with deep breathing techniques and changing thinking patterns to perceive themselves more positively.
Wise Minded Music: A DBT based group combined with Music Therapy approaches where teens identify strengths and push their own personal boundaries to build distress tolerance skills and mindfulness.
New Directions: Small group for teens who are engaging in self-harm; youth learn CBT and DBT skills, explore distraction techniques, and use psychoeducation to learn how to speak with their providers.
Mindfulness: A mindfulness-based skills group where teens are introduced to the concept of mindfulness and meditation. Each week they will learn how to manage stress using mindfulness-based coping skills. Every group combines psychoeducation around a mindfulness or DBT topic, as well as practicing a live meditation together.
Emotion Management Groups
Family Matters: This discussion-based group focuses on family functioning, dynamics, and relationships, including strengths of and stressors on healthy functioning and how dynamics change during adolescence.
Symptom Survival: In this discussion-based group teens are encouraged to share their personal experiences with the symptoms of their diagnoses. With an emphasis on mutual aid and psychoeducation, teens learn to support each other and themselves while navigating the complexity of mental health.
Art of Healing: This group focuses on experiences of grief and loss in families, peer groups, and communities. Teens also explore loss that may be experienced with mental illness, including loss of skills, relationships, and interests.
The Weekend: This group, offered on Mondays, focuses on reflections from the weekend. It is a time to share positive experiences and process difficult times over the weekend. This group offers teens the opportunity to reflect, support and challenge peers, and examine decision making and coping skills.
Social Skill Building Groups
STEAMwork: S.T.E.A.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) develops a set of thinking, reasoning, teamwork, investigative and creative skills that teens can use in all areas of their lives. In STEAM lessons, youth use problem solving and team building skills to address social, economic, and environmental problems.
Community Meeting: This group is dedicated to fostering a sense of community. Teens collectively process the previous week, address related challenges, and explore upcoming events and expectations.
Coffee Talk: This skill-based group focuses on building the social skills and pragmatic language skills required to form and maintain positive interpersonal relationships.
Branch Out: This group is an outdoor, activity-based group where teens work together as a team to complete challenges and solve problems. Youth will build confidence as they learn how to work effectively with peers.
What's Love Got To Do With It?: A relationships group that focuses on healthy relationships with self, peers, and in the community. Topics such as boundaries, communication, levels of friendship, and types of love will be explored through discussion and activities using music, art, and other media.

Squad: This activity-based group focuses on building problem-solving and social skills while teens practice working effectively as a group with cooperation, teamwork and positive social interactions.
Out of the Box : This group encourages social interactions through open-ended discussions about social issues.
Jump Start/Daily Review: In this group, teens are involved in different activities to develop social and executive functioning skills; activities include games, goal setting and organizing the day.
Expressive Therapy Groups
Express Yourself: In this expressive therapy group teens practice self-expression and explore new ways to cope through creative activities, including multimedia art, music, creative writing, and sensory activities.
Moods and Media: In this group, teens observe examples drawn from various media sources to develop analytical skills related to increasing awareness and perspective around topics of self-image, violence, advertising, bullying, peer pressure, and relationship building.
Survey Says: A self-regulation group in which teens help to design question around topics of interest in order to build active listening skills and learn about peer interests.
Health and Wellness Groups
Healthy Living: This group focuses on education and discussion around health issues, nutrition, physical fitness, and other teen topics. Groups focus on promoting a healthy lifestyle.
Fitness: This group focuses on activities specifically designed to promote health and exercise. Connections are made to a healthy life, stress relief, and community.
Boys/Girls/Gender Bender Group: This group allows teens to address concerns and normalize experiences specific to their gender identity.
Growth and Development Groups
Mission Possible: This group focuses on basic life skills necessary for successful transitions into the community. Topics may include cooking, planning, budgeting, prioritizing, job skills, community resources, and independent living.
Study Hall: This group is designed for teens to complete assignments provided by their schools.
Current Events: In this group, teens work collaboratively to discuss and process recent current events and world news. Through discussions within the group setting, youth learn how to respectfully share their views and receive feedback.
Treat Yo'self: In this discussion- and activity-based group teens discuss the importance of self-care and engage in activities that foster this skill set to assist with their symptom management.
I'm Worth It: The goal of this skills-based group is to enhance self-esteem and increase self-compassion. Groups will encourage clients to identify personal competencies and strengths, practice using positive affirmations in helpful ways, and learn how media messages impact the way we view ourselves.
Adulting: This group focuses on the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Group members will participate in discussions and activities about various life changes after high school. They will also receive coaching on how to accomplish tasks such as filling out college and job applications.
Creatively Me: A discussion and activity-based group with a purpose of exploring identity in adolescence using ingenious and imaginative ways. The group will uncover limitless ways to manifest creativity unique to each individual while building confidence in their own self-discovery.
20/20 Vision: An activity and discussion-based group about finding one's identity in adolescence. This group takes a strength-based approach and is designed to increase one's self-confidence and self-awareness by exploring identity as it relates to personality, social life and peers, self-esteem and stigma.