

Riverside Community Care

Leading the Way in Behavioral Healthcare & Human Services

Welcome to the Life Skills Center,

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

Life Skills Center offers a small client-to-staff ratio and focus on a sense of community and wellbeing that is essential for effective group work. Life Skills works collaboratively with families, providers, schools, and community-supports to integrate into adolescents' existing support systems in order keep the adolescent 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.

The following pages provide information that more closely outlines the types of therapeutic groups offered and the structure of the program. Should you have further questions please feel free to contact the Program Director at the location nearest to you.

Sincerely,

Katherine Christopher

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Program Director
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Riverside Life Skills Centers

Riverside Life Skills Centers 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.

Life Skills clients 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.

Life Skills Centers 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 and clients 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 Life Skills Centers' 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 adolescent at Life Skills is assigned a primary master's level clinician who coordinates the teen's goals and treatment in program. Every adolescent 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 a 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,

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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 adolescents at Life Skills have struggled to manage the academic and social stressors at school. We support teens and families to work with each teen's 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 to collaboratively identify what they need to more effectively manage academic demands 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 Life Skills schedule includes Study Hall periods for teens to complete assignments, Life Skills does not provide academic instruction.

Collaboration:

Our clinical staff will work with every adolescent's 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

The Life Skills Center is funded by the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH). Youth who are already enrolled in DMH services can submit the 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 in order 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.

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Riverside Life Skills Center 2025 Calendar

JANUARY						
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2025 Important Dates

Wednesday, January 1, 2025

New Year's Day – Program Closed

Monday, January 20, 2025

Martin Luther King Jr. Day – Program Closed

Monday, February 17, 2025

Presidents' Day – Program Closed

Monday, April 21, 2025

Patriots' Day – Program Closed

Monday, May 26, 2025

Memorial Day – Program Closed

Thursday, June 19, 2025

Juneteenth – Program Closed

Friday, July 4, 2025

Independence Day – Program Closed

Monday, September 1, 2025

Labor Day – Program Closed

Monday, October 13, 2025

Indigenous Peoples' (Columbus) Day – Program Closed

Tuesday, November 11, 2025

Veterans Day – Program Closed

Thursday, November 27, 2025

Thanksgiving Day – Program Closed

Friday, November 28, 2025

Day After Thanksgiving Day – Program Closed

Thursday, December 25, 2025

Christmas Day – Program Closed

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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 adolescents 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. Clients 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 clients identify strengths and push their own personal boundaries to build distress tolerance skills and mindfulness.
New Directions: Small group for adolescents who are engaging in self-harm. Adolescents learn CBT and DBT skills, explore distraction techniques, and use psychoeducation to learn how to speak with providers.
Mindfulness: A mindfulness-based skills group where adolescents 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 adolescents 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 adolescents' experiences of grief and loss within their families, peer group, and communities. It also includes grief and losses that may be experienced with mental illness, including loss of abilities and skills, relationships, interests, and hope.
The Weekend: This group focuses on the adolescent's weekend. It is a time to share positive experiences and process difficult times over the weekend. This group offers adolescents the opportunity to reflect, support and challenge peers, and to 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, clients 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. Adolescents 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 clients work together as a team to complete challenges and solve problems. Clients will learn how to work effectively with others while building confidence and connecting with their 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.

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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, adolescents are involved in different activities, including games, goal setting and organizing their day, in order to develop social and executive functioning skills.

Expressive Therapy Groups

Express Yourself: In this expressive therapy group teens practice self-expression and explore new ways to cope through creative activities, including multi-media art, music, creative writing, and sensory activities.

Moods and Media: By observing examples drawn from various media sources teens develop analytical skills related to increased awareness and perspective around topics of self-image, violence, advertising, bullying, peer pressure, and relationship building.

Survey Says: A self-regulation group in which adolescents help to design question and topics of interest, utilize active listening of peer interests and incorporate it into group presentation.

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/Trans & Non-binary 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, budgeting, prioritizing, job skills, driver's education, community resources, independent living, and planning for college or work.

Study Hall: This group is designed for adolescents to complete assignments provided by their schools.

Current Events: In this group, adolescents work collaboratively to discuss and process recent current events and world news. Through discussions within the group setting, adolescents 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 skill-based group is to enhance self-esteem and increase self-compassion. Select 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.

Adulthood: 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.

Community Expectations at Life Skills Center

Attendance

Youth are expected to attend program every day.

It is important that youth attend program every day to benefit from the program and to work on their individual goals. Any excused absences should be reported to the Primary Clinician or Program Director, either prior to the absence or that morning. Extended absences may jeopardize placement in the program. Five consecutive unexcused absences can result in dismissal from the Life Skills Center, per Department of Mental Health standards.

Confidentiality

Youth are expected to maintain the confidentiality of their peers.

In order to create a safe and healthy therapeutic environment, all youth agree to keep the confidentiality of their peers. Youth may not discuss the experiences of peers or discussions from program outside of program. Additionally, what happens in group, stays in group, and should not be discussed elsewhere.

Contact with Peers Outside of the Program

Outside contact with enrolled peers is prohibited.

In order maintain an optimum therapeutic environment, all enrolled youth in Riverside Life Skills Center are prohibited from any contact with other enrolled youth outside of program hours. Prohibited contact includes but is not limited to in-person socializing, text messaging, phone calls, all social media contact, and all online gaming platforms.

Enrolled youth are prohibited from exchanging contact information until they discharge, including cell phone numbers, emails, and all social media, gaming site, and online usernames. When youth discharge from Life Skills Center, their peers have the opportunity to provide them with their contact information.

Cell Phone Use

Cell phones use is not allowed in program.

Although youth may bring phones to program, use of cell phones is prohibited during the program day. Youth must turn off cell phones and store them out of sight for the day and may be asked to turn-in phones to staff if they are unable to keep phones stored and out of use. In the case of an emergency, or therapeutic necessity, youth will be provided use of the phones with staff observation.

Use of appropriate language

All members of the community are expected to use respectful and appropriate language.

Maintaining a safe and healthy environment is crucial to the community at the Life Skills Center. Appropriate language must always be used. Language should be respectful to all members of the group and community. Hate speech and hateful actions will not be tolerated.

Discussion with Peers

Staff must always be able to hear all conversations.

Staff must be able to hear conversations at all times and side conversations among enrolled youth are not allowed. It is important that we maintain confidentiality for everyone, therefore it is expected that previously enrolled youth are not brought up in conversation after they are discharged. There is also no talking about others that are not present in the discussion. If there is a need to talk about someone in one's personal life in group, a pseudonym may be used for context.

Maintaining Healthy Boundaries

Healthy boundaries are expected, both physically and verbally.

This is a no touch program and we always give each other ample personal space. Additionally, conversations should be kept respectful and positive.

Refocusing Time

Youth may take space to refocus as a coping strategy.

Time to refocus can be an effective coping strategy when experiencing difficult emotions. We encourage youth to seek out staff to request time to refocus when needed. Staff may encourage youth to take time away from the group to refocus due to either disruptive behaviors or difficult emotions. Youth may be asked to process with staff before returning to activities.

Other Coping Strategies

Youth will learn and utilize coping tools in program.

Youth explore and engage in healthy coping strategies in group and with their individual clinicians. Youth may request assistance identifying and engaging in coping skills as needed.

Break Time

Break time activities include appropriate peer socializing and using relaxation techniques.

During scheduled breaks youth are encouraged to engage in constructive activities, such as appropriate conversation with peers and staff, cooperative games, or relaxation techniques.

Environment

All community members are expected to treat the environment with respect.

We treat our environment with respect. Feet are not to be on furniture, including chairs, tables, and couches in the community space. It is also expected that youth do not put their heads down on the tables, including the kitchen and group room table. In order to keep the space clean, eating and drinking are allowed in the kitchen area and only during scheduled snack times, lunch time, or as a planned activity (water is available at all times).

Computer and Tablet Use

Technology use must be appropriate and is monitored at all times.

Laptops are provided for academic use during the Study Hall periods, as needed. Youth may bring in their own devices to complete academic work during Study Halls only. Technology use will be monitored by staff. If youth are unable to use devices appropriately, they will not be allowed to bring or use them in program.

Lunch

Youth are expected to bring and eat their lunch daily.

Youth are required to bring their own lunch to program. In order to maintain a fair and friendly environment, sharing food at lunch is not allowed unless it is planned with a staff member. Youth are expected to eat lunch at their scheduled time and those unable to do so will be encouraged to meet with staff to discuss concerns.

Dress Code at Life Skills Center

Dress Code Philosophy

Life Skills Center's dress code supports equitable therapeutic access and is written in a manner that does not reinforce stereotypes. To ensure its effective and equitable enforcement, staff shall enforce the dress code consistently and in a manner that does not reinforce or increase marginalization or oppression of any group based on race, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, cultural observance, household income or body type/size.

Dress Code Basic Principle

Certain body parts must be covered for all people at all times.

Clothes must be worn in a way such that genitals, buttocks, breasts, and nipples are fully covered with opaque (not see through) fabric.

Community members **Must** Wear:

- A Shirt (with fabric in the front, back, and on the sides under the arms), AND
- Pants/jeans or the equivalent skirt, sweatpants, leggings, a dress or shorts (with fabric in the front, back, and on the sides), AND
- Shoes.

Community members **May** Wear:

- Hats and other headwear may be worn if they allow the face to be visible and do not interfere with the line of sight to any youth or staff.
- Hoodies may be worn with the hood up if the youth's face and ears are visible to staff.
- Fitted clothing
- Pajamas
- Ripped jeans/pants, as long as underwear and buttocks are not exposed
- Tank tops, any style

- Athletic attire

Community members **Cannot** Wear:

- Images or language depicting or suggesting violence or weaponry
- Images or language depicting or suggesting drugs, alcohol, vaping or paraphernalia (or any illegal item or activity)
- Bullet proof vest, body armor, tactical gear, or facsimile
- Hate speech, profanity, pornography
- Images or language that creates a hostile or intimidating environment based on any protected class or consistently marginalized groups
- Any clothing that reveals visible undergarments (visible waistbands and visible straps allowed)
- Swimsuits
- Accessories that could be considered dangerous or could be used as a weapon
- Any item that obscures the face or ears (except as a religious observance or safety precaution due to COVID).