



SILA Skills
SKILLS IN LIFE FOR ALL

Transforming Classrooms

The SILA Skills Group is a Canadian federally incorporated, not-for-profit corporation that believes in building mental health resilience by fostering supportive, validating, and respectful environments.

About SILA Skills

The mission of SILA Skills is to build mental health resilience in communities across Canada. SILA Skills does this by bringing life-saving emotional skills to those whose stressful jobs carry significant responsibility and who have lasting impacts on their communities. SILA Skills brings these skills to people working on the front lines in education, health care and social services, helping them to support their own mental health as well as learn practical ways to respond effectively to situations within their work setting.

Program Overview

The SILA program, titled Transforming Classrooms, targets mental health in a preventative way, providing emotional skills that can avert emotional and mental health crises. By approaching mental health and emotional wellbeing in this manner, SILA Skills endeavours to pre-empt the development of psychological conditions compromising the individual's ability to meet the demands of both work and home. Learning the skills enhances stress management.

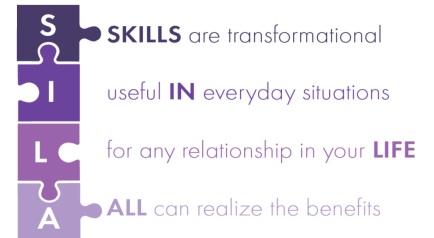
Important assumptions of SILA Skills workshops are that:

1. An individual's well-being within the home and work settings is interdependent; and 2. Managing one's emotions and communicating effectively enhances overall emotional well-being and resilience and increases the ability to manage stress.

The SILA program draws on skills from Dialectical Behaviour Therapy, an evidence-based practice that provides a structured way of learning emotional coping skills and building mental health resilience. The dialectic involves learning to accept difficult thoughts, feelings and behaviours while at the same time learning to change them. The program is delivered through a series of workshops during which participants are taught skills that are enhancing of mental health and they are guided in the application of the skills using real-life scenarios.

SILA Skills clients

SILA clients include Children's Aid Societies, crisis workers, social workers, public health workers and educators. SILA has recently renewed its contract to provide workshops to teachers and educational staff in over 25 schools in Alberta.



What SILA Skills clients are saying:

“Learning these skills allowed me to work more effectively with people in crisis while also removing the pressure I place on myself to say the “right” thing. Before practicing and applying validation and mindfulness I had a difficult time de-escalating seemingly impossible situations. Entering into a crisis situation often evoked internal feelings of distress and panic, and I would think to myself “what could I possibly say or do to diffuse this?” It has been incredible to watch how a sense of calm can come over someone when instead of trying to solve the problem or match their level of distress, I validate their feelings of fear, anger, and sadness that are often present in a crisis.”

“I want to let you know how much I appreciate being able to attend your SILA course. It has given me a whole new perspective on how to deal with children, adults & myself. It has also validated, & named some of the things that I had been doing all along. I have started to use many of the skills taught to me & have noticed a positive reaction. I realize that I will stumble, and that is okay. I would highly recommend this course to anyone working with children.”

“Excellent series, highly recommend anyone and everyone take this training to improve workplace outcomes, personal relationships and self-control.”

“What I appreciated about the SILA workshop {compared to others I have done} is that it taught me something that I could use immediately.”

Workshop outcomes

The objective of the SILA workshops is to promote positive mental health and emotional well-being in all who work in the education environment in order to increase job satisfaction and effectiveness and decrease absenteeism associated with mental health challenges. Participation in the workshops is intended to enable police service members to:

- ✓ De-escalate tense or emotional situations and connect effectively during these intense situations through the development of a variety of skills
- ✓ Negotiate effectively in relationships in order to meet objectives
- ✓ Build trust and skillfully manage challenging relationships
- ✓ Be aware of and understand their own emotional experience and how it affects them
- ✓ Recognize their own emotional vulnerability and reactivity and develop the skills to keep their emotions under control
- ✓ Build and maintain relationships through effective communication

Transforming Classrooms Workshops

Content of Workshops

The content of the workshop consists of a set of practical skills that build upon and leverage each other to provide participants with tools to help them understand and manage their emotions effectively, maintain effective relationships, and effectively manage and adapt to stressful situations or crises.

The core skills taught by SILA are interrelated and fall into the following four categories:

Mindfulness Skills

These skills are foundational for the other three categories of skills described below. They teach the importance of experiencing and staying in the present and the skills needed to do so. Mindfulness skills enable individuals to notice thoughts and emotions AND provide tools to overcome negative thoughts or judgements about themselves, others, and past situations as well as worries about the future. Learning to control the focus of attention in this way helps decrease emotional reactivity and regain control of emotions in the moment, which is critical to effectively managing stress in the moment and over time.

Through skills of mindfulness, participants are able to control their thoughts and emotions rather than their thoughts and emotions controlling them. In turn, they are able to leave behind the stress of work in order to focus energy and attention on family, friends, and personal interests, all of which are critical in the maintenance of mental health and resilience.

Distress Tolerance Skills

These skills enable individuals to manage overwhelming emotions in the face of crisis situations. These skills teach participants how to survive in a situation that has no immediate solution by reducing the emotional intensity and allowing them to be more effective for themselves and others while not making the situation worse.

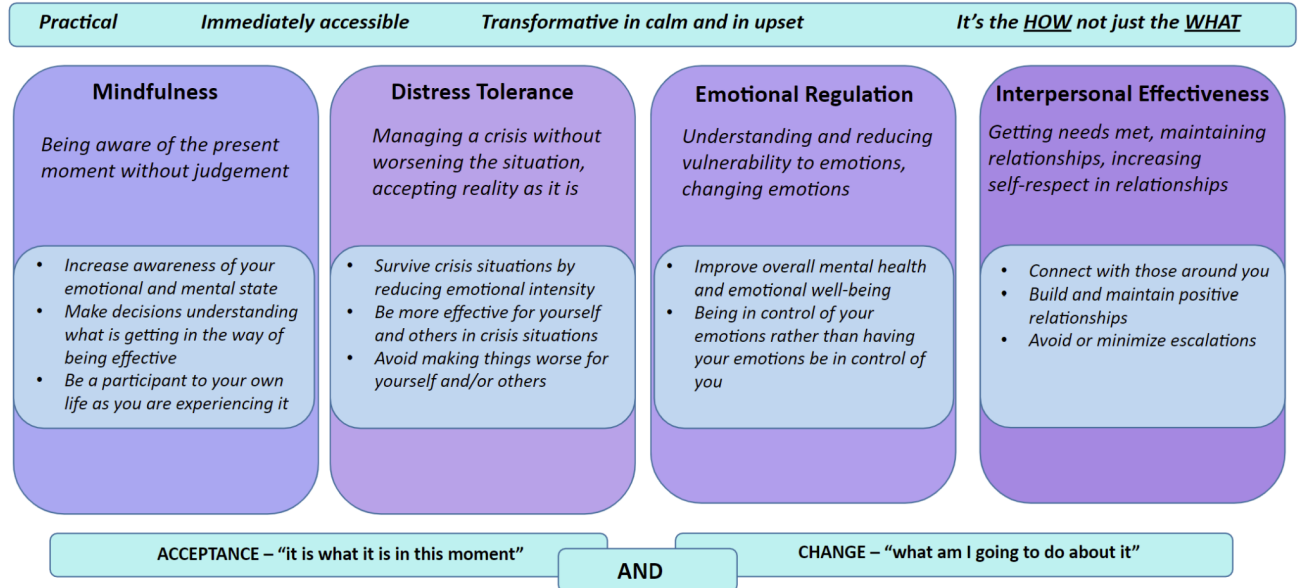
Emotion Regulation Skills

These skills help reduce emotional vulnerability and reactivity in order to effectively manage emotion and avoid dysfunctional behaviours and patterns of communication that are based on painful emotions.

Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills

These skills enable participants to build and maintain positive, healthy relationships through improved communication. Communicating effectively with others enables participants to attain objectives, resolve conflict, and strengthen the human connections needed to thrive in both work and home settings.

The following diagram outlines what an individual could expect to gain from participating in the Transforming Classrooms workshop.



Structure of Workshops

SILA’s approach to training is unique in that it combines theory and practice, in a way that is very accessible. Through a workshop that is participatory, SILA teaches not only what the skills are but also how to implement them. Skills are taught through a virtual platform by a facilitator who engages participants in a discussion of their own experiences in learning and applying the skills. Participants have the opportunity to consult with the facilitator between sessions to obtain additional coaching regarding their use of skills taught and any difficulties they may have experienced in implementing them.

The workshop includes 12 hours of training offered over a variety of formats (2-part, 4-part or 6-part). Each session includes the teaching of new skills and the opportunity to practice the skills within the session. In order to consolidate the skills that are taught, participants are encouraged to practise the skills outside of the workshop through the use of exercises provided. Each session also includes a review of skills previously taught.

SILA also periodically provides Skills in Action or SIA sessions. These sessions offer participants the opportunity to receive coaching and to problem-solve with regard to their application of the skills. SIA sessions are offered monthly at no cost to past participants of the Transforming Classrooms workshop. Participants who have attended these sessions comment on how valuable they are to consolidate everything they learned in the workshop.