



Lifelong Learning

Overview

When someone tells you that they went to the “university of life”, they’re usually trying to tell you why you don’t really need a formal education to navigate life. On the other hand, we hear other people talk about more structured education as a way to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to achieve the goals we have and make our contribution to the world.

They both have a point. Lifelong learning means learning is not limited to “school”, and that there are learning opportunities, both informal and formal, inside and outside of what we might traditionally think of as “education”, and that we can embrace these at any time in our lives.

However, lifelong learning also requires certain things from us, and doesn’t always happen when we’re simply dropped into the world and left to get on with things ourselves. Equally, just going to a school or university does not automatically make us lifelong learners. So let’s explore what it is, why it is so important, and how we can all become lifelong learners.





In this Article

- What is lifelong learning?
- Why is lifelong learning important?
- How to foster lifelong learning
- How does lifelong learning happen at Learnlife?

What is lifelong learning?

Lifelong learning means that we think more broadly about what learning actually is, including where, when and how it happens. Two important points are that:

- Learning is not limited to a certain age or to a formal educational environment, such as a school
- Learning is location agnostic, meaning it can happen anywhere
- When our learning is [purpose-driven](#), there are learning opportunities in everything we do throughout our lives

Learning happens all the time, and it is not just in moments where we are consciously building new knowledge or skills. Think of all of our social processes and interactions, or the way we develop our behavioural patterns or our sense of right and wrong. Think of the things we witness that make us reflect or reframe our concept of life or the events that happen to us directly or indirectly and shape who we are.

All around us are constant learning experiences that can change the way we think, what we believe and how we act. All of this can be learned, and it happens throughout our lives. Lifelong learning is really about embracing this and developing an understanding that you are in control and can direct and extract learning from all of these things.

When someone watches a documentary on, for example, climate change, and decides to dedicate some time to understand it better, they may do a number of things such as reading and building understanding, discussing issues with others, getting into activism or doing formal or informal courses to build more structure around their knowledge. That course might be formal like a college course with a certificate, or it might be an online course without any tests or exams, where the learning is all we are looking for.

The point is that a lifelong learner decides what suits them best for each learning experience. As an example, perhaps we want to deconstruct experiences we have already had, and reflect on the learning they have brought, such as when we examine privilege, identity and systemic racism. That might be quite an individual process, with journalling and some online discussion. This might be a different learning experience from deciding to construct new knowledge, such as learning



how to cook healthier meals, where you might prefer to spend time observing how someone else does it.

Lifelong learning is to embrace that the learning journey never ends, and that each day presents opportunities for us to follow our passions and curiosities. That means we do not have to pick a path early in life and stick to it, and we are capable of change, growth and redirection at any time.

Why is lifelong learning important?

Lifelong learning is important because we know that, if we understand how to learn, grow and adapt in any situation, we are less likely to feel trapped by events outside our control, and more likely to continuously evolve in pursuit of what makes us happy.

The world ahead of us is Volatile, Uncertain, Ambiguous, and Complex ([VUCA](#)). Climate change, biodiversity loss, global famine, migration, and all of this in an increasingly complex digital world that is changing so quickly make it hard to predict what will happen next. Preparing learners for this world means embracing the uncertainty and helping them develop skills that they can use to chart a course of self-reliance through whatever comes their way.

Self-reliance is critical here. [Knapper & Cropley](#) (2000) wrote that lifelong learners:

- Plan their own learning.
- Evaluate their own learning
- Are active
- Are open to learning in both formal and informal environments.
- Integrate knowledge from different subject fields in appropriate situations.
- Use different learning strategies for problems or different situations.

We see that the lifelong learner is always in the driving seat, motivating themselves for learning, deciding how, when and where to pursue it, and this is a way of approaching learning that anyone in any part of their life can benefit from. As life throws us challenges, as it surely will, the lifelong learner is ready and able to adapt, grow, unlearn and ultimately evolve.

How to foster lifelong learning

Developing skills to build learning from resources that already exist is one thing, but tomorrow's world requires lifelong learners who can also [create new understanding](#). Technology, for example, is one area where we must constantly unlearn and relearn new concepts, tools, ideas, just to keep up!



Passion is key here. How do we motivate ourselves to learn if we do not have that internal spark to set us off? Finding out what you like doing is the first step to becoming a lifelong learner, but how can we do this?

Play is a great way to make space for this. Whether tinkering with a device or software programme, a recipe or a business idea, play is that unscripted place where the magic happens. Just being lost in something for a while, or bouncing ideas off a friend without any real sense of agenda, making time for play in its broad sense is a vital part of finding out what you like to do (and what sparks your curiosity) on your own terms.

When you discover that new piece of software and think to yourself, “what might we do with this?”, then begins the iterative process of play, and as we tinker our way through the delights and frustrations of the process to see where it leads, this feels just as good to children as it does to adults. Trust us.

Building tolerance for setbacks is another important part of becoming a lifelong learner. Learning is not linear, and though finding your own way through something is certainly the strongest way to learn it, this can and will be challenging. Accepting the learning opportunity that “failures” really are is another key step towards lifelong learning.

Lastly, a [growth mindset](#) is important. All human brains have more or less the same amount of neurons, and the way we connect them to build new skills and knowledge is completely malleable. [We can change](#), we can grow, so much so that our lives can become unrecognizably different in a short space of time. Not just recognising but *internalising* this truth of our own innate ability to always grow and learn is another tenet of lifelong learning.

How does lifelong learning happen at Learnlife?

At Learnlife we offer a [personal learning experience](#), where you are in the driving seat. Finding your passion or *ikigai* comes first, and learning is all around us as we find and build it. There is flexibility in what, how, when and where you learn, and that’s just for starters.

Learnlife offers a range of experiences and [Lifelong Learning Programmes](#) that support you to explore different aspects of yourself and to reflect on the way you learn. Through [360-degree feedback](#), we grow in self-awareness, so that when the next steps come, you know how to move yourself forward.

At Learnlife we also invite the outside world into our learning spaces. Learners should never feel that learning can only happen when you are siloed away from the world because it really is the opposite. Guest experts come to share their



knowledge and passion with our learners, whether that be in 3D animation, cooking, or business.

Parents are encouraged to come in too; not only to share their expertise and insight but to learn new skills together with us. Lifelong learning requires a positive learning culture, in which we can share and feel like we all belong. There are also opportunities for learners to join us in evenings, weekends, summers or even just a few days per week, combined with learning elsewhere

By not walling ourselves off from the world, and by exploring a range of learning experiences based on solving problems and addressing the questions we have about the world around us, our learners are encouraged to develop lifelong learning skills that will take them wherever they want to go next.

This is a fluid learning environment, not only because you are unique, and your learning experiences should be anything but predictable and pre-designed, but because the world, the future, your future is just as vibrant and open.

In Summary...

Have you fallen in love with learning? Do you accept that your brain is ready to grow with you, forging new patterns and erasing others as you experience and internalise new things? Do you embrace setbacks as a learning opportunity and know-how to get the best out of yourself in moving forward? Can you [set the direction in your own learning](#), and decide how best to get there? Can you reach out to others for help and use a range of different ways to learn the things that spark your curiosities and passions? Then congratulations, you might just be a lifelong learner!

Our Blogs on Lifelong Learning

- [Lifelong learning needs good feedback](#)
- [Community story: From the school of life to lifelong learning](#)
- [Learn, Unlearn, Relearn](#)

Our Programmes

- [Community Programmes](#)



Elements of the Learning Paradigm

- [Purpose-Inspired Learning](#)
- [360° Learning Assessments & Outputs](#)

Further Reading

- [Learning: the treasure within; report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century \(highlights\)](#)
- [LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE NEW EDUCATIONAL ORDER:](#)
- [15 Ways of the Successful Self-Directed Learner](#)
- [Lifelong learning and the future of work: challenges and opportunities](#)
- [How to Embrace Being a Lifelong Learner](#)

Sources

- [What Motivates Lifelong Learners](#)
- [\(PDF\) Lifelong Learning: What does it Mean?](#)
- [LIFELONG LEARNING: CONCLUSIONS FROM A LITERATURE REVIEW](#)
- [Knapper, CK, & Cropley, A. \(2000\). Lifelong learning in higher education. London Kogan Page. - References - Scientific Research Publishing](#)
- [Tom Vander Ark on the benefits of "smart cities"](#)