THE REPAIR REVOLUTION

Why did we stop fixing things?

CEFR: B1 · Intermediate | **Speaking goal:** Explain everyday causes, compare past and present habits and propose useful school subjects.

01 TALK FIRST

1. Describe something you threw away recently. Could it have been repaired?

2. Which practical skill have you learned from a family member or online tutorial?

3. What skill do you wish you knew, and why?

02 READ / The skills we used to learn

Imagine that your favourite jeans have a small hole. Would you repair them, ask someone for help or buy another pair? Many people choose the last option, even when the jeans could last much longer.

Repairing things used to be a normal part of daily life for many families. People mended clothes, maintained bicycles and kept basic tools at home. However, we should not imagine that every old product was better. We remember the strong items that survived and often forget the ones that broke.

Some American schools helped students learn practical skills. In traditional Home Economics classes, students might cook, sew or manage a household budget. In Shop classes, they learned to use tools or work with wood and metal. These classes were not identical in every school, and related courses still exist today under other names. Spain has Technology and vocational courses, but not an exact national equivalent of traditional US Home Ec.

Why repair less now? New products can be surprisingly inexpensive, while paying a skilled worker takes money. Some modern objects are also hard to open or need special parts. Even a simple repair can be frustrating when nobody at home knows how to do it.

A growing number of Repair Cafés offer another approach. Volunteers help visitors examine broken objects and sometimes teach them a skill. A successful repair saves an item from the bin. Even an unsuccessful one can help someone understand how a product works.

Perhaps schools should teach more life skills again. But which lessons should students lose to make time? And should it be a school's job to teach every practical skill? The answer may depend on what families, local businesses and community groups can already offer.

03 VOCABULARY / Match the words and meanings

The definitions are mixed. Write the matching letter beside each word.

1. mend	**A.** continue to exist or work
2. household	**B.** useful for doing things in real life
3. budget	**C.** someone who works without being paid
4. workshop	**D.** having the training or ability to do something well
5. replace	**E.** an extra part used to repair a product
6. spare part	**F.** put a new thing in the place of an old one

7. skilled	**G.** a place where people build or repair things
8. volunteer	**H.** a plan for how money will be spent
9. practical	**I.** connected with the people and things in a home
10. survive	**J.** repair clothes or other fabric

USE THE WORDS / Complete the sentences

1. I need a new _____ for the bicycle, not a new bicycle.

2. We should plan our spending with a monthly _____.

3. My grandmother can _____ a torn shirt.

4. The mechanic is very _____ and solves difficult problems.

Make it yours: use two expressions in your own opinion.

04 READ BETWEEN THE LINES

1. What is one reason repairs can be expensive?

A) Skilled labour costs money

B) Tools are always free

C) Every product lasts forever

2. What did traditional Shop classes often teach?

A) Only foreign languages

B) Tool use and practical construction

C) Only football

3. Does the article say these subjects have completely disappeared?

A) Yes, everywhere

B) No; related courses still exist

C) Only in Spain

4. What might a Repair Café offer besides a fixed object?

A) A free new product

B) A useful skill

C) A new school certificate

05 WATCH / Optional short classroom video

Repair Café: volunteers helping to fix household technology · BBC News

Watch the first 4 minutes at most; the full report is optional further viewing.

Open the original video

Before: Predict three objects people might take to a Repair Café.

During: Check your predictions. Why is the café run by volunteers?

After: Would a Repair Café work in your town? What would it need?

If video is unavailable: At a Repair Café, volunteers help people with broken household technology. Labour costs can make small professional repairs difficult to offer at a competitive price.

06 SAY WHAT YOU REALLY THINK

1. Were people better at repairs in the past? What evidence would you need?

2. Have cheap products changed our shopping habits?

3. What do Home Economics and Shop classes sound like to you?

4. Which everyday skills should schools teach?

5. Can YouTube replace learning from a teacher or relative?

6. Is it fair to expect everyone to repair their own things?

7. What skill do you wish you knew?

07 GROUP DECISION / Bring back Life Skills?

Your school can offer one new weekly class. You have to choose five skills from cooking, sewing, money management, bicycle repair, basic DIY, first aid, gardening, electronics and consumer rights. There is only one hour per week.

Student representative

Choose skills that young people want and will really use.

Teacher

Think about safety, materials, lesson time and the curriculum.

Parent or carer

Think about independence, family needs and costs.

Final outcome: Agree on five skills, put them in order and present a four-sentence argument for your choices.

Useful expressions

• We ought to teach ...

• It would be useful because ...

• Compared with ..., ...

• One disadvantage is ...

• Could we compromise by ...?

08 KEEP EXPLORING / Read & Watch More

These are optional resources to explore after class, not compulsory homework.

READ · A2+ · 5 min: Repair Café International

Explore a community approach to sharing practical repair skills.

READ · B1+ · 4 min: EU: new consumer right to repair

Official 2026 overview of the products and obligations covered.

WATCH · B1+ · Short video: BBC News: a Repair Café

Meet volunteers keeping small household objects in use.

Think about it: What would make a Repair Café successful?

SOURCES BEHIND THE READING

Original English reading, informed by these primary references. The legal measures cover specified products, not every item.

European Commission - right to repair (2026)

Council of the EU - repair rights explained

US education statistics - Home Economics history

More ideas? Suggest a topic at https://bilingually-curious.pages.dev/suggest/