



# Cultivating Purpose in Adolescence

**A** sense of *purpose* is a feeling of direction in life that guides us day to day toward activities that matter to us.

Purpose is an overwhelmingly positive resource during adolescence, when we are establishing who we are and developing increased cognitive and social abilities that allow us to make a meaningful impact on the world around us. Adolescents with a greater sense of purpose are happier, healthier, and more motivated to achieve a wide range of positive developmental outcomes.

For young people who experience challenges including poverty, racism, and other forms of discrimination, a sense of purpose can help reduce the negative consequences of experiencing these challenges. Yet too often, youth who most need it have the least access to the opportunities that could support them to develop their sense of purpose.

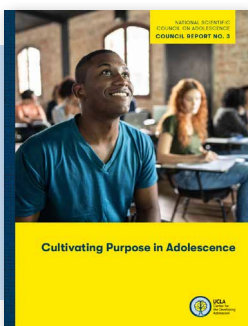
To cultivate a sense of purpose, adolescents need opportunities and support to discover and actively explore their interests, try new experiences, and learn through trial and error. They may try new extracurricular activities or clubs, volunteer for a cause, or learn a skill outside of their standard school curriculum. Importantly, they pursue this cultivation with help from supportive adults, schools, and communities.

Helping youth to develop their sense of purpose promotes their positive development and benefits our communities as these young people contribute to the people and communities around them.

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## What adults can do to support youth:

- Ensure that young people have access to educational, extracurricular, and vocational opportunities to explore their purpose in healthy and safe settings.
  - Provide and advocate for financial resources to support adolescents to explore their interests.
  - Offer emotional support as youth navigate the trial-and-error process of cultivating their sense of purpose.
  - Help youth find and connect with online and community resources such as clubs or volunteer opportunities.
  - Prioritize programs and policies that support parents to provide a healthy and safe environment for exploration within their family and home life.
  - Create opportunities for youth to reflect on and share their purpose with others.
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To learn more about the research into adolescents' sense of purpose and the kinds of programs and policies that could help youth cultivate purpose, read the report from the National Scientific Council on Adolescence, [\*Cultivating Purpose in Adolescence\*](#).