Applying Research to Help Youth Discover their Purpose in Life

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Purpose in life

A stable and generalized intention
to accomplish something
that is at once personally meaningful
and at the same time
leads to productive engagement
with some aspect of the world beyond the self

(Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003)
Purpose is beneficial

- Associated with psychological health, including
  - Hope (Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Talib, & Finch, 2009)
  - Happiness, (French & Joseph, 1999)
  - Life satisfaction (Bronk, et al, 2009)

- Associated with improved physical health, including
  - Improved cardiovascular and metabolic markers (Ryff, Singer, & Love, 2004)
  - Less chronic pain (Kass, Friedman, Leserman, Caudill, Suttermeister, & Benson, 1991)
  - A regression in cancers and other autoimmune diseases (Melnechuk, 1988)
  - Longevity (Boyle, Barnes, Buchman, & Bennett, 2009; Krause, 2009)

- Associated with indicators of academic success, including
  - Grit (Hill, Burrow, & Bronk, 2014)
  - Resiliency (Benard, 1991)
  - An internal locus of control (Pizzolato, Brown, & Kanny, 2011)
  - Academic efficacy (Solberg, O’Brien, Villarreal, Kennel, & Davis, 1993)
Purpose is rare

- No purpose in life: 24%
- Clear purpose in life: 20%
- Dreamers: 32%
- Self-focused life goals: 24%

(Bronk, Finch, & Talib, 2010; Damon, 2008; Francis, 2000; 2010; Moran, 2009)
Efforts to foster purpose
Pathways to purpose
Guidelines for fostering purpose

Consider language
Offer time and guidance for reflection
Share examples
Challenge youth to think about:
  ◦ Personal strengths
  ◦ Deeply held values
  ◦ Gratitude
Offer feedback and prompts to deepen thinking
Listen to youth
Help youth get involved
Provide support to help them remain engaged
Thank you!!

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