MAGIC WAND

Difficulty: MODERATE | Frequency: VARIABLE | Duration: 15 MINS

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Purpose is an important key to well-being. Purposeful people tend to be more hopeful, optimistic, and satisfied with life. Young people with purpose find schoolwork more meaningful, and they tend to have a greater sense of efficacy at school. In the face of challenges, people with a sense of purpose show more grit and resilience. Purpose may even promote better health and longevity.

But having a purpose is rare: Research suggests that only one-fifth of adolescents and one-third of young adults believe they lead a life of purpose. Activities like the Magic Wand can help in your search for a sharper sense of direction in life.

TIME REQUIRED

15 minutes to reflect and write. You can also combine this across a few days with other purpose practices, such as Talk with Teens about Purpose.

HOW TO DO IT

Finding a purpose in life is a process that unfolds over time. It involves reflecting on ourselves, our lives, and the world, as well as exploring different paths and directions. This writing activity offers one way to reflect on your purpose in life, which could reveal some new ideas and opportunities.

To start, think about the world you live in. This includes your home, your community, and the world at large.

Imagine you've been given a magic wand, and you can change anything you want to change in the world. What would you want to be different? Why? Describe your ideal world in writing.

Now, reflect on what it would take to change the world in this way. Is there anything you can do to help move the world closer to this ideal? If so, explain how; if not, explain why not.

You can be as creative and imaginative as you want for this exercise. Use whatever writing style you like, and do not worry about spelling or grammar.

This exercise was studied among young adults ages 18 to 30, but it could also be valuable for high school students. You can do this activity yourself, or help facilitate a young person in doing it.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Bronk, K.C., Baumsteiger, R., Mangan, S., Riches, B., Dubon, V., Benavides, C., & Bono, G. (2019). Fostering purpose among young adults: Effective online interventions. *Journal of Character Education* 15(2), 21–38.

Some young adults completed a "purpose toolkit" over three days, where they engaged in activities including the Magic Wand, while others worked on memorization exercises. Compared to the people who performed the memory activities, people who completed the Magic Wand and other purpose practices were more successful at searching for and identifying a purpose in their life.

WHY TO TRY IT

A purpose has three important qualities to it. It's long-term—a far-reaching goal that provides us with a sense of direction. That goal must be personally meaningful to us as individuals, and also have the potential to make a difference in the broader world.

Some goals that we pursue are personally meaningful, but not as significant for our communities—like mastering an instrument or finding a long-term partner. Those goals may be valuable, but they may not necessarily bring all the benefits of a full-fledged sense of purpose.

Instead of focusing on our passions or aspirations, this exercise starts from the lens of the world, inviting you to consider problems that need solving. That means that any goal you conjure up will naturally be aimed at improving society, which is crucial to cultivating a genuine purpose.

SOURCES

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This practice is part of Greater Good in Action, a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley and HopeLab.

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