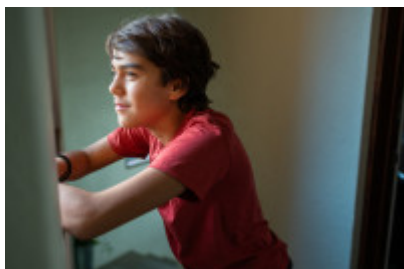


REFLECTING ON IMPORTANT VALUES FOR TEENS

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



WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

As parents, we want our children to live meaningful lives. Yet the many distractions and demands of modern society might leave us feeling a bit uncertain about the meaning of our own lives, let alone whether we can help our children find the meaning of theirs. Reflecting and journaling about values is a simple way to help teens in the journey toward a sense of purpose.

Teens with purpose are better equipped to cope with difficulties and live happier lives. Research has found that teens who report a greater sense of purpose also have **greater coping skills and show more resilience**, as well as **well-being**.

TIME REQUIRED

This practice can take as little as 15 minutes a week.

HOW TO DO IT

This practice helps you guide your teen in reflecting on what's important to them in life, in other words, their personal values.

Ask your teen to take a moment to identify some of their personal values. You can describe values as follows:

Values are beliefs. For instance, someone who believes that everyone should be able to feel safe in all settings, might hold a strong value for security. Values guide our actions—a value for justice might lead someone to join a protest. Values serve as criteria for how we evaluate others or policies. They can refer to desirable goals, such as a value for power. And furthermore, they can be specific to situations. This means people can have multiple values, which can differ in their levels of importance. At home, someone might place a greater emphasis on the value of benevolence, while at school or work, that person might place a greater emphasis on the value of achievement.

Then, ask your teen to spend about 10 minutes writing a narrative around their values. For more guidance and inspiration, you can use the prompts and questions below to get your teen started.

Guiding Prompts:

- “I am thankful for all the experiences in my life. However, what shaped me into who I am today was . . .”

- “I will never forget the lesson [name] taught me that day in . . .”
- “We were fortunate to get to spend time with our family and friends that year at . . .”
- “That day will live in my memory forever because it was the day that I realized I have only one life to live, and I must . . .”
- “I had never really considered the consequences of my decisions. However, the day I [decision, event, etc.] will remain in my mind forever.”

Broad Questions:

- Describe a personal experience that has helped you develop your values. How do these values influence the way you approach life?
- Describe a time in your life when someone helped you. How has this affected your values and approach to life?
- What values would you like to develop to become a better person?
- How have your values guided your personal development to date and how might they influence your future development?

You can even model this process by sharing your own personal values with your teen. If time allows, take a moment to write a short narrative along with your teen, and take turns sharing your reflections with each other.

You can modify this practice as needed. For instance, you might simply talk through this kind of reflection with your teen whenever it's most convenient, like when you're commuting to school, over a meal, or right before bedtime.

Optional: You might even buy a journal for your teen and encourage them to use it on a regular basis.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Banyard, V., Hamby, S., & Grych, J. (2016). [Using Values Narratives to Promote Youth Well-being in Schools: An Exploratory Quantitative Evaluation of the Laws of Life Essay](#). *School Social Work Journal*, 40(2), 1-16.

Individuals between the ages of 12 and 24 who wrote about values in middle or high school in an engaged way also reported greater well-being, self-regulation and emotion regulation strengths, and sense of purpose than young people who didn't do the writing practice or weren't engaged with it.

Banyard, V., Hamby, S., de St. Aubin, E., & Grych, J. (2019). Values narratives for personal growth: Formative evaluation of the laws of life essay program. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 59(2), 269-293.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167815618494>

Based on interviews, adolescent and adult participants said they found writing about values helpful, as it allowed them the opportunity to gain clarity around challenges they faced, their own values, and themselves.

WHY TO TRY IT

Writing about values helps strengthen teens' sense of self, meaning, and purpose because it allows them to make new connections between various parts of their life experiences. Written language is highly structured, and through writing, teens are guided to create narratives, see patterns, and reach new understandings about their own lives.

For instance, you might have a teen who volunteers at an animal shelter but has never given much thought to why they do it. Through this practice, your teen might realize that their volunteer work is driven by their value of compassion toward those who cannot advocate for themselves. Volunteering might stop feeling like just another hobby and become more of a source of purpose and meaning for your teen.

Such written reflections might even spark a desire among your teens to further cultivate their sense of 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](#).

