

Adolescents who have a sense of purpose are happier and healthier. How can we help?

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Helping young people develop a sense of purpose in life could build their resilience and prevent declines in mental health, according to [a report](#) released Nov. 1 by the National Scientific Council on Adolescence, part

of the UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent.

The research report, co-authored by UCLA's Andrew Fuligni, co-executive director of the center and a professor in the department of psychiatry and biobehavioral sciences, outlines why having a sense of purpose is a key aspect of healthy adolescent development and describes what parents, educators, community leaders, policymakers and others can do to help.

"This report highlights the kinds of activities and resources that could help support all young people in discovering their direction and how they want to contribute to the world," Fuligni said.

During adolescence, young people are navigating peer and [family relationships](#), developing their identities, and defining what their values are. Resources that assist them on this journey and help them discover a sense of purpose can bolster their [mental health](#), contribute to resilience, reduce unhealthy behaviors, and provide direction and motivation, the [report](#) shows. Such support is especially crucial today, with youth still navigating challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic in addition to rapidly changing digital landscapes.

Youth who have a greater sense of purpose, for example, feel less dependent on [social media](#) and are less concerned about "likes" and online approval for self-validation, the researchers noted.

It is also crucially important, Fuligni said, that adolescents from traditionally underserved groups have equitable access to activities, resources and support that can help them in this regard. "We know that youth who most need it often have the least access to the kinds of opportunities that cultivate a sense of purpose," he said.

Fuligni and his co-authors offer several recommendations for

policymakers and community leaders, including:

- Ensuring that all young people have access to educational, extracurricular and vocational opportunities.
- Providing [financial resources](#) to support adolescents in exploring their interests.
- Prioritizing programs and policies that support families' ability provide a healthy and safe environment to help children discover their unique talents and contributions.

"Purpose is a forward-looking life aim that guides your actions and decisions," said co-author Anthony Burrow, director of the Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research at Cornell University, where he is an associate professor in the department of psychology.

"When [young people](#) cultivate a sense of purpose, greater health and well-being, social connection, and resilience are evident, not to mention the potential contributions they make in the world as they pursue their valued aim."

More information: Cultivating Purpose in Adolescence.
[developingadolescent.semel.ucl ... eport 2023 FINAL.pdf](#)

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

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