



How to help a child find their purpose

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Having a clear sense of purpose in life has unlimited benefits for a child. This worksheet helps kids explore and define their unique purpose in life.

Having a purpose offers big rewards for kids. Purpose means having a long-term goal we care about that uses our interests and talents and contributes to the world. Research shows that adults who have a sense of purpose are happier, healthier, and more hopeful. People with purpose even report having better sleep and better cardiovascular health! Young people with a sense of purpose are less likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as using drugs and alcohol. They're also more academically successful and feel their schoolwork is more meaningful than students without purpose.

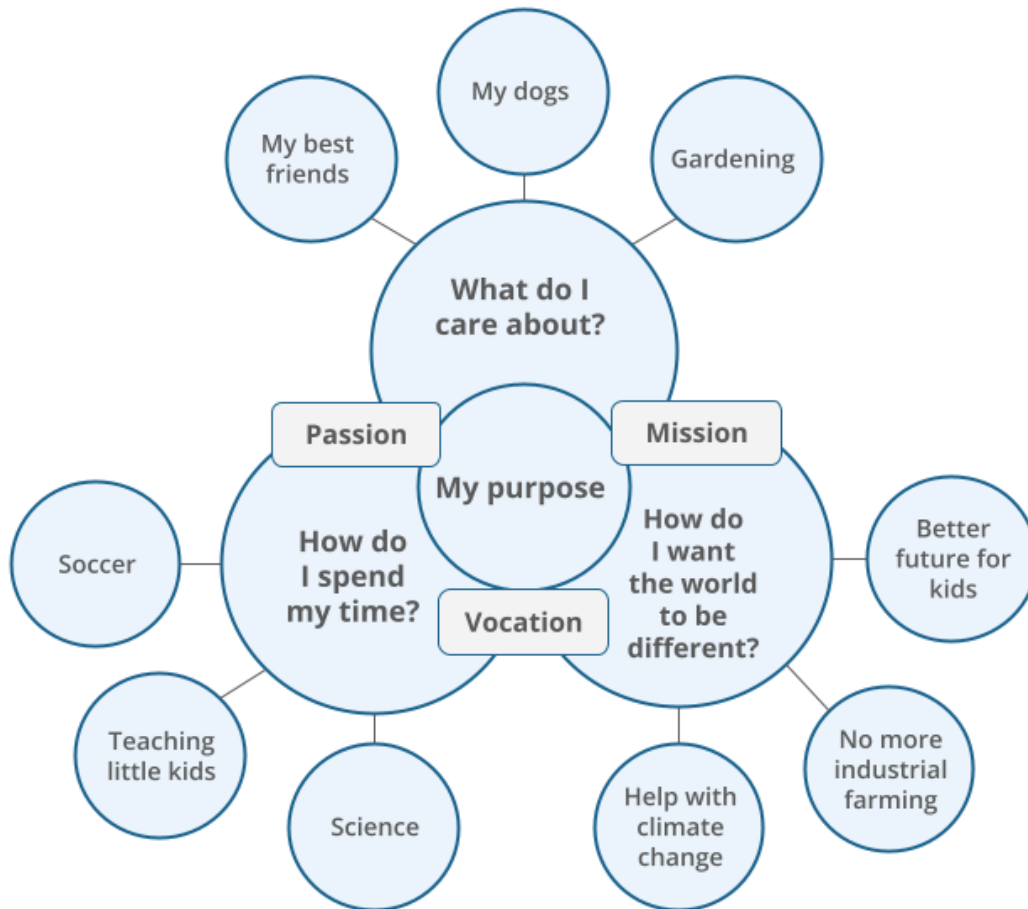
But here's the thing: it's not a guarantee. Only one in five teens report having a sense of purpose — and only 40 percent of adults. (It's very uncommon for children under 14 to develop a sense of purpose.) So it can be especially valuable to help your child begin the process of exploring what they care about, what their talents are, and how they want the world to change.

Are the people who discover their purpose just lucky? No. According to Kendall Cotton Bronk, a professor of psychology at the Claremont Graduate University, the idea of "discovering" your purpose is a myth. People who have purpose continually search for purpose. They spend time thinking about what they care about and set goals to use their talents to make a difference, solve a problem, or contribute in some way.

This Purpose Mind Map is adapted from a study by researchers at Stanford University. In the study, pairs of young people interviewed each other about what they cared about, what talents or skills they had, and what change they wanted to see in the world. Then they each drew their own mind map. The point of the study was to measure levels of purpose in young people. But an interesting outcome of the study was that this single 45-minute exercise seemed to improve the young people's sense of purpose. When researchers contacted the participants six months later, the study participants had significantly higher rates of purpose than they had before.

What exactly is a Purpose Mind Map?

Below is an example of a teenage girl who explored her interests, skills, and what she wanted to see changed in the world.



Have your child create their own Purpose Mind Map

Start by having your child or student answer the three questions below, which come from the three big circles in the diagram. (You can listen to a father and daughter discuss these questions at the 11:09 mark of [“The power of purpose”](#) episode of GreatSchools' podcast, *Like a Sponge*.)

Note of caution to adults sharing this with teens: This exercise is about having teens explore their sense of purpose. Your role is to be non-judgemental and curious. Stick to open-ended questions and open-minded comments, which research shows spark creativity and collaboration. (e.g. "That's interesting!" "Can you tell me more about that?" instead of negative comments like "Yikes, you really want to do that?" or even positive ones like "Wow, that's amazing!") After all, this is the beginning of an ongoing exploration to help them identify *their* purpose, not anyone else's.

- **What do you care about?**

This can be anything from family and friends to animals and your neighborhood.

- **How do you spend your time?**

This can be school-related, like science and math, or hobbies, like sports, reading, gaming, and baking. It can also be broader activities like “organizing parties” or “building things.”

- **How do I want the world to be different?**

This can be anything from protecting animals to addressing social justice issues or it can be more concrete like “youth should get to vote.”

Have your child explain their mind map and share their ideas about how they could put their talents to use in an area that they care about. Brainstorm new ideas or career paths together. Have them choose one idea that they're interested in taking some action on or researching further. Some possibilities for your child:

- **Call someone** who works in a field or on a cause they're interested in.
- **Look up articles** on people who are working in a field or a related cause.
- **Research 2-3 organizations** that work in a related area to see what they like and don't like about what the organization is doing.
- **Search for a documentary film** about something they're passionate about; the family can watch and discuss it together.

Purpose Mind Map

