



## BEST POSSIBLE SELF

*"The future cannot be predicted, but futures can be invented."*

—Dennis Gabor

### OVERVIEW

Students write answers to questions about what they want their lives to be at age 40.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Any time during the school year, but especially at the beginning of the year to help students discover or start on the path to finding their purpose
- To help students develop content for college entrance essays. Visit [www.purposechallenge.org](http://www.purposechallenge.org) for more information.

#### TIME REQUIRED

- 15-30 minutes

#### LEVEL

- Middle School
- High School
- College

#### MATERIALS

- Best Possible Self Handout
- Writing materials

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Imagine and write about their lives at 40

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Responsible Decision-Making

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to identify the three most important values to you listed on the handout. Why are these values so important to you? How do they influence your daily life and your long-term plans?

### INSTRUCTIONS

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### THE PRACTICE

Before you begin:

1. This practice can be used on its own, but is meant to be the fifth in a series of practices that help students discover or begin their search for purpose.
  2. Students can also do the entire series of practices online for free at [www.purposechallenge.org](http://www.purposechallenge.org). Have them click on "Toolkit" and then register for an account. When they finish the practices, they will receive a digital record of their written answers for each exercise in addition to instructions on how to take these answers and turn them into a college entrance essay.
- If using this practice on its own, review the definition of purpose with students using the instructions from the first four bullets in *Discovering Your Strengths and Talents--Purpose Challenge, Exercise 1*
  - Tell students that they're going to do an exercise that allows them to be as creative as they want to be -- they're going to imagine what their lives might be like at 40.
  - Start by inviting students to close their eyes or to look at a spot on the floor in front of them, and to take a few deep breaths. Say:

- *Take a moment to imagine your life at 40 years of age. Things have gone as well as you possibly could have hoped. Silently visualize your answers to my next questions.*
- *What will you be doing?*
- *Who will be in your life?*
- *What will be most important to you?*
- Next, give students the Best Possible Self handout and ask them to complete it on their own.
- When students have finished, give students the opportunity to share either their writing or their thoughts about this process with each other or with the whole class, if they feel comfortable doing so.

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## CLOSURE

- Ask students to reflect on whether this exercise confirmed their sense of purpose or, if they aren't sure of their purpose, did it give them any clues or insight into what their purpose might be?

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

How did students respond to this practice? Did they find it helpful in helping them decide what their purpose might be?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

A key developmental task of adolescents is [planning for their future](#), namely in the areas of education, work, family, friendship, and material success. Studies with diverse groups of students have found that a positive vision for the future is related to fewer [behavior challenges](#) and negative peer influences and greater social support and school involvement, as well as better [goal-management skills](#).

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Many of our students face overwhelming obstacles due to factors beyond their control, such as institutional racism and poverty. Helping them to see a positive future for themselves can place them on a path of both purpose and hope -- the "what" and the "how" of their future life -- motivating them to [overcome obstacles](#) and achieve their dreams.

## SOURCE

The Purpose Challenge Toolkit was created by [Dr. Kendall Cotton-Bronk](#) in partnership with the Greater Good Science Center and [Prosocial](#). For more information, visit [www.purposechallenge.org](http://www.purposechallenge.org)