



## EXPLORING YOUR PERSONAL VALUES

*“Keep your thoughts positive because your thoughts become your words. Keep your words positive because your words become your behavior. Keep your behavior positive because your behavior becomes your habits. Keep your habits positive because your habits become your values. Keep your values positive because your values become your destiny.”*

–Mahatma Gandhi

### OVERVIEW

Students sort value statements in order of importance, and then reflect on the ones that mean the most to them. (Purpose Challenge Practice #4)

### LEVELS

- Middle School
- High School
- College

### 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

- 30-45 minutes

#### MATERIALS

- Handout: [Exploring Your Personal Values](#)
- Writing materials

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Sort a list of values in order of importance
- Reflect on how the most important values impact their lives and their future plans

## 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

#### BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- This practice can be used on its own, but is meant to be the fourth in a [series of practices](#) that help students discover or begin their search for purpose.
- 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.

#### THE ACTIVITY

- If using this practice on its own, review the definition of purpose with students using the instructions from the first four bullets under “Setting Up the Activity” in [Discovering Your Strengths and Talents](#).
- Tell students:
  - Your personal values are core to your purpose in life. The things you believe in and value deeply are likely to shape the aims that give your life purpose. With that in mind, take a few minutes to complete the handout that asks you to sort a list of values by how important each is to you.
  - Give each student a [handout](#) and have them complete it on their own.
  - Once students have finished, have them write answers to the following questions about the items that they placed a “1” next to (these questions are also listed at the bottom of the handout):

- Why are these particular values so important to you? What do they say about the kind of person you are?
  - How do they influence your daily life?
  - How do they relate to your long-term plans? Do they influence the way you hope to leave your mark? If so, how? If not, why not?
- 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?

## 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)

## 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 IT

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

A longitudinal study of almost 12,000 people born in 1970 in the UK found that [values that adolescents](#) believed would be important to them as adults predicted adult behavior and roles.

For example, valuing family in the future predicted marriage and children, but not full-time work, possibly due to the demands of childrearing. Civic values predicted adult civic behaviors, but did not predict having children. The authors speculated that this group may have decided to delay having children or perhaps chose not to do so in order to dedicate more time to greater civic causes.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Giving students the opportunity to identify what matters most to them can help them envision their lives as adults. This, in turn, can help them discover a sense of purpose and to set goals for achieving their greatest dreams.

## TERMS OF USE

Thank you for downloading this resource! Please feel free to share it with friends, teachers, colleagues, and anyone else who might benefit from it.

Greater Good in Education is a free online resource produced by UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center. Visit our website at [ggie.berkeley.edu](http://ggie.berkeley.edu) to choose from more than 300 practices that can be

incorporated into all aspects of a school community, from academic instruction to staff meetings to engagement with parents.

Please email us at [ggsceducation@berkeley.edu](mailto:ggsceducation@berkeley.edu) with any questions about our programs and resources for educators.

With gratitude,  
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