

Ways to Cultivate Young People's Possible Selves

We know the importance of helping all young people develop a positive view of themselves in the future and connecting their ability to become that positive possible self to the actions they do—or do not—take every day.

For this reason, having a clear, positive idea of their "best possible selves" can motivate young people to work harder and do better in school, particularly if they are shown connections between what they're doing in school and these future aspirations. Ideas:



1. **Connect:** The foundation of helping youth cultivate their possible selves is to build a strong relationship with them. As a mentor you are doing just that. With growing trust in the relationship, your mentee is more likely to open up to you. Then they're more likely to share with you what they really aspire to do or be.
2. **Describe:** When the opportunity arises, engage your mentee in conversation that encourages them to recognize how what they are learning in school will help them in the future, including how they will use the knowledge and skills in future learning that will ultimately help them achieve their goals and aspirations.
3. **Reveal:** When relevant, and in an age and context appropriate way, share your own sense of purpose related to your profession or hobbies. While your mentee may not share your specific interest, your energy and enthusiasm can still inspire them to reflect on what really matters for them.
4. **Notice:** Pay attention to the things young people are interested in. This lets them know that you see and support their aspirations for the future. Ask what they enjoy. How does it relate to their hopes or goals for the next few years? Where possible, find connections between what's important to them and their focus on learning in school.
5. **Coach:** Be creative about incorporating your mentee's stated or demonstrated interests into the activities or conversations the two of you engage in when you meet. Encourage them in coming up with their own ideas for exploring these interests.
6. **Dig deeper:** When young people are disengaged, don't immediately dismiss their behavior as evidence that they don't care. Try to connect with their aspirations, which can help to re-engage them in learning.

In the end, a student's possible self must come from within; teachers, parents, mentors and others can't impose it or create it for the young person. However, adults can open up opportunities, create relationships, and be available and supportive as young people explore and discover their aspirations and sense of purpose.

Adapted from [7 Ways to Cultivate Young People's Possible Selves](http://www.search-institute.org/blog/cultivate-possible-selves) from Search Institute. To read the original article, click here <http://www.search-institute.org/blog/cultivate-possible-selves>