

Supporting Young Adults: Strategies for Cultivating Purpose And Well-Being

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Young adulthood is a developmental stage filled with unique challenges and opportunities. Previous generations often observed young adults as appearing directionless and without ambition. However, today's young adults are not lacking ambition; they have redefined it. They seek a balanced life, emphasizing well-being over traditional markers of success. They often struggle with a lack of direction and angst about not knowing what they want to do with their lives. This perception of insecure footing in their life can create a sense of distress as they find their way through this transformational period. The distress they experience lends itself to depression and anxiety. Yet, despite these challenges, young adults possess remarkable strengths and potential for a hopeful future.

Redefining Ambition

The current generation of young adults values well-being and work-life balance more than previous generations. They see work not as an identity-defining endeavor but as a means to achieve a higher quality of life. This perspective can sometimes be mistaken for a lack of ambition, but young adults have a different definition of success. They prioritize personal fulfillment, meaningful relationships, and social contributions over traditional career milestones.

Emotional Awareness and Articulation

Young adults today are more emotionally aware and articulate than ever before. This emotional intelligence allows them to identify and label their feelings of loneliness, directionlessness, and financial insecurity. Despite their insecurities about prospects for romantic relationships and opportunities for meaningful friendships, they are capable of developing deep, meaningful relationships and contributing to their communities. While significant, this generation's emotional struggles can also lead to

valuable insights and coping strategies that will serve them well throughout their lives.

Challenges and Hardships

Young adults face numerous challenges, including financial worries, lack of direction, and achievement pressure. Many experience a lack of purpose and find little meaning in school or work, contributing to high rates of anxiety and depression. Social media exacerbates these feelings, often creating unrealistic comparisons and fears about the future. Yet, these challenges are not insurmountable. By acknowledging these issues and seeking support, young adults can develop resilience, develop and work toward achievable goals, and develop a sense of purpose and meaning.

Reasons for Hope

Despite the distress, there are many reasons for hope. Young adults spearhead work on vital social issues, demonstrating a strong sense of social responsibility. They have more faith in each other than in older generations, fostering a sense of community and collective action. They aren't expecting older generations to clean up the environment, accomplish social justice, or eliminate governmental corruption. They know it's up to them. They feel responsible for social change. Though significant, their challenges can lead to growth, producing insights, coping strategies, and resilience crucial for later life.

Building Supportive Environments

Families, communities, and institutions can all have a hand in helping this generation reduce its distress and maximize its strengths. We can create supportive environments that encourage open communication, emotional expression, skill building and relationship skill development that helps eliminate loneliness, and build a sense of belonging. We can create opportunities that help them find personal direction and fulfillment, by providing opportunities for engagement and participation in meaningful cooperative endeavors. We can individually listen to them, encourage their self-care, teach them when asked, and serve as their cheerleaders.

The challenges young adults face today are complicated, but they are not without solutions. By fostering environments that support meaningful relationships, and a sense of purpose, and overall well-being, we can help young adults manage and grow through this critical stage of life. Their potential is immense. With respectful support and encouragement, we can ease some of their challenges, helping them lead fulfilling lives and making great contributions to society now and in the future.

Source: Making Caring Common. (2023). On Edge: Understanding and Preventing Young Adults' Mental Health Challenges. <https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/reports/on-edge>.

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