



Hope and your mental health: tips for young people

What is hope?

Hope is an abstract concept that has been defined in many ways by different groups of people. As a young person, what does hope mean to you?

Research tells us that young people view hope as “a foundational element for their goals and plans”.¹ For some, hope provides self-confidence, the belief that their goals are achievable, and the determination to pursue those goals. Young people also see hope as something they can rely on when plans change or when they feel lost. Hope is part of being human.¹

So why do we sometimes feel hopeful, and other times not so much?

Our sense of hope is influenced positively and negatively by many factors, both internal and external. Internal factors may include things like your future goals, spirituality, mental health, and physical health. External factors could be things like financial situations, support from others, relationships, and shifting life situations.²

When internal and external factors are positive and balanced, we tend to have a stronger sense of hope. When they are out of balance, we can feel things are hopeless. Understanding these factors and perspectives can help us achieve the balance we need.



“

**Keep a little fire
burning; however
small, however
hidden.**

Cormac McCarthy

”

The benefits of hope

Experiencing hope has many benefits. Maybe you have experienced some of these?



- Greater problem-solving abilities ³
- Believing in yourself ⁴
- Greater life satisfaction ⁵
- Higher self-worth ⁵
- Increased athletic performance ^{6,7}
- Better academic performance ⁸
- Improved well-being ⁹
- Better mental health ⁵

Hope and academic performance

Research shows that students with higher levels of hope tend to achieve better academic outcomes.⁸ In fact, hope can contribute in a positive way overall in an educational setting, and not just academically. For example, a study involving first-year college students found that students with higher levels of hope not only had better GPAs but were also more likely to graduate and less likely to be expelled from school.¹⁰

Hope and mental health

Hope is an important factor in young people's mental health and psychological wellness.¹¹ Research tells us that people who are high in hope are more likely to report positive mental health outcomes.¹²

In particular, having high levels of hope during challenging times has been shown to actually protect and foster mental health.¹³ For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, young people with higher levels of hope reported greater well-being and lower levels of mental illness compared to those with less hope.¹³

How hopeful are young people?

A 2020 report from Statistics Canada suggests that young people living in Canada, particularly those aged 15 to 34, are less hopeful about the future compared to previous years.¹⁴

Young people's sense of hope can vary significantly based on their experiences and identities. For instance, transgender and non-binary individuals are less hopeful about their future compared to their cisgender counterparts.¹⁴

Young people who are vulnerable or at-risk of being isolated in their communities may face factors that limit their sense of hope.¹⁵ It might be difficult for them to think about future goals and plans because their opportunities are limited.

These findings highlight the importance of fostering a sense of hope and optimism among young people, especially those who face additional challenges.



How can you cultivate your sense of hope?

To encourage and nurture your sense of hope, it's important to consider the internal and external factors that can influence your outlook and how you feel.² Once you have identified those factors, you can try different strategies. Successfully adopting and using these strategies can enhance your sense of hope and overall well-being.

Some internal strategies you can use:

- Focus on your future goals, attitude, and passions.²
- Set realistic and achievable goals to increase your confidence and trust in your ability to make a significant impact and meaningful contribution to our society.²
- Engage in refocusing activities, such as mindfulness practices, to maintain a positive mindset.²
- Practice self-awareness to understand and navigate your emotional landscape more effectively.¹⁶



Externally, you can try some of these ideas:

- Sharing your experiences and aspirations with others can allow you to develop meaningful relationships that you can rely on in times of need. Look for encouragement and motivation from friends, family, or counselors. Surround yourself with positive influences and role models.²
- Actively engage with your community to explore activities aligned with your interests and values.
- Be mindful of negative influences and situations beyond your control, such as economic challenges, and focus on what you can do to address them – for example, seeking financial aid, exploring part-time job opportunities.²

Additional resources



- Check out these [goal-setting worksheets](#) to help you set SMART goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound.
- This [webpage](#) by Kids Help Phone will teach you 8 ways to foster hope in your daily life.
- See this blog post and learn about [how to cultivate hope when you feel you have little hope](#).

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