

The Purpose Challenge

KENDALL COTTON BRONK, an associate professor of psychology at Claremont Graduate University, is on a mission: to help young people discover their purpose in life. Doing so, she says, carries with it a number of potential benefits, among them, healthier and happier futures. Dr. Bronk actually has the research to prove it. And she's recently dedicated her efforts to translate that research into practice.

Working in close association with the Greater Good Science Center, the social change firm ProSocial, and the John Templeton Foundation, Bronk and her collaborators developed the Purpose Challenge. This free online toolkit is filled with activities to help high school students—particularly seniors—discover the nature of purpose as it relates to their individual lives.

Designed to be both thought-provoking and fun, the Purpose Challenge helps students think deeply about what matters most to them, what they hope to accomplish in their lives, and what mark they hope to leave on the world. The activities can be completed over the course of a week or two. During this time, students log on to the website four times (ideally on four different days), and spend roughly 15-20 minutes completing exercises. Activities include viewing and responding to brief video clips, sorting out value statements, seeking feedback from others who are most likely to know the things they feel passionate about, and imagining and writing about what they hope their ideal lives will look like at age 40.

Parents and educators are encouraged to try out the activities as well. Parents will find ideas on how to help their teens cultivate a sense of purpose. Educators will find ways to help students further reflect upon their responses, and, when possible, to integrate questions about purpose into the curriculum.

“Students rarely have the opportunity to think deeply about why they might want to aspire to a certain career down the road,” says Bronk. “Far more often, they’re asked *what* they want to do someday, rather than thinking about the *why*. Thinking deeply about the why forces us to think

about our purpose.” Bronk also knows that students need to be both guided and supported through this process, which is what the toolkit is designed to do. Upon completion, students will have thought deeply about the importance of making a contribution to the world, one that’s beyond thinking only about what’s best for oneself.

After completing all the activities, students are asked to write an essay based upon what they’ve learned about their purpose in life. High school seniors can use the essay in their college application process. It will speak volumes about their time spent thinking about larger-than-self goals, and the role a college education can play in helping them achieve these goals. At one point, students could enter their essays in a contest; the winner received a \$25K scholarship and runners-up received smaller monetary awards. Although the contest is no longer offered, the winning essays are available at purposechallenge.org/contest/.

No doubt, all high school students can benefit from the Purpose Challenge. But might it have special importance for students with ADHD, executive function challenges, and related differences? Experts often say students with these challenges perform so much better when engaged in tasks or jobs in which they feel an enduring interest. The Purpose Challenge can provide them the time, structure, and support to think more deeply about their interests—as well as the mark they hope to leave on the world. **A**

A clinical and consulting psychologist, Mark Katz, PhD, is the director of Learning Development Services, an educational, psychological, and neuropsychological center in San Diego, California. As a contributing editor to Attention magazine, he writes the Promising Practices column and serves on the editorial advisory board. He is also a former member of CHADD's professional advisory board and a recipient of the CHADD Hall of Fame Award.

FOR MORE INFO

Visit purposechallenge.org.

Watch a video about Dr. Bronk's work on the nature and role of purpose and its relationship to healthy growth at [youtube.com/watch?v=b08kTApY-MM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b08kTApY-MM).

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