

Think back to when you were a young person – trying to decide what career path to follow, if and what to study, or where you wanted to be in five or ten years' time. Whilst young South Africans say they are optimistic about the long-term future, their "lives, dreams and opportunities" continue to be shaped by persistent poverty and inequality.¹ Encouraging young people to think positively about themselves and helping them to find their strengths or "personal power" is critical if we want to support a generation of youth who believe they can change their lives – and the country at large.

1

WHO AM I?

Developing self-knowledge

The more they get to know – and like – themselves, the easier it will be for young people to work out where they want to go in life, and how to get there. Most importantly, a solid sense of self will help them keep on going when obstacles get in their way. To help a young person develop greater self-knowledge, try these activities:

- **Get them to write a list of what they like most about themselves.** If they struggle to do so, write down "who am I" at the top of a page; then get them to write down responses for a minute. Talk through the responses together, looking for positives along the way e.g. I am a sister, friend, etc.
- **Using old magazines, encourage the young person to create two collages:** one entitled "Who I am now," and the other, "Who I would like to be". Discuss their choice of images in each collage. Ask how the collages compare to one another and what steps they can take to become the person they would like to be.
- **Get the young person to write down the things they like least about themselves.** Together discuss why they feel these things apply to them – and ways in which they can work on their 'weaknesses' or perceived shortcomings.



WHAT DO I WANT TO DO?

2

Establishing a sense of direction

Deciding what to do in life is one of the biggest decisions a young person can make. In addition to finding their strengths, try these talking points to help them choose a career that's right for them:

- **What are their interests?** Do you like being indoors or outdoors? Do you like reading and/or studying? Do you like numbers or do you like being creative?
- **What are their values?** These are the things that are most important to us, and give us purpose. For example, if the young person values helping others, they may want a job in the NGO sector; if they value fun and freedom, a desktop job may not be right for them; if they like imparting knowledge, teaching could be a good fit...
- **What are their expectations?** It's important to provide honest feedback to ensure youth set realistic goals. For example, are their salary expectations too high for an entry-level job, or do they want a job that is not in demand versus a job on the scarce skills list (see 'Recommended Resources' box above)?

CELEBRATING YOUNG PEOPLE'S STRENGTHS:

Every person in the world has strengths but people often struggle to name them. Use these questions to help youth pinpoint theirs:

■ **When were or are you at your best?** Describe a place or situation where you shine and feel good about yourself?

■ **What are you not just good at – but also LIKE to do?** For example, are you good at babysitting and enjoy spending time with children?

■ **If they cannot think of any of their own strengths, get the young person to ask a friend or relative.** If you're able to, give suggestions of your own and let them know when you saw them put these strengths into action!

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:

Share this free online strengths test: <https://www.viacharacter.org/survey/account/register>

To help youth work out their values, try: https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_85.htm

For a list of scarce skills, click here: http://www.careernavigator.co.za/?p=read_news&articleId=26&article=