We have recently been discussing results from a recent science report titled ‘What science has shown can help young people with anxiety and depression: identifying and reviewing the 'active ingredients' of effective interventions’ [1]. The next part of this series that we will discuss is from the ‘Beliefs and knowledges’ series of articles, and is titled ‘sense of purpose’.

What is sense of purpose?

A sense of purpose refers to the extent that people believe their lives have meaning, direction and achievable goals. [2]

Why is a sense of purpose important?

A sense of purpose can be achieved through gratitude, long term goal setting, and identifying your values. Some research has shown that not doing these can increase anxiety and depression for young people.

What did the research show?

The researchers looked at all of the studies that measured a sense of purpose. They found that studies that measured a combined approach of fostering gratitude, and identifying appropriate goals and directions in life, lead to the greatest improvements in anxiety and depression in young people.

What did young people think about a sense of purpose?

Young people who had lived experience of mental health problems themselves thought that finding a sense of purpose had strong links to their own mental health. Finding appropriate cultural ways of achieving this was also important, e.g. through families or individual practices.

How could a young person could find a sense of purpose?

Practicing being grateful for things in your life, or trying to set out your short and long term goals for your life, can be really helpful in finding your sense of purpose.

Are there any other resources to help with a sense of purpose?

There are heaps of ideas to help you foster a sense of purpose on this website: https://www.annafreud.org/resources/children-and-young-peoples-wellbeing/self-care/

**References**

1. Wellcome. *Report summary: What science has shown can help young people with anxiety and depression*. 2022; Available from: <https://wellcome.org/reports/what-science-has-shown-can-help-young-people-anxiety-and-depression>.

2. Hielscher, E., Julie Blake, Ivan Chang, Tara Crandon, Martina McGrath, and James Scott. 2022. “Sense of Purpose Interventions for Depression and Anxiety in Adolescents and Young Adults: A Scoping Review and Cross-cultural Youth Consultation.” PsyArXiv. August 12. doi:10.31234/osf.io/sequ4.