

## The Power and Science of Hope

### Background

The mission of BYS is to promote the social and emotional well-being of area young people.

Research shows that fostering increased levels of Hope is a great place to start.

The “science of Hope” is a growing and developing field of research that is grounded on a strong foundation of positive psychology with more than 20 years of research exploring the mental capacities, character strengths, and characteristics that help all children/adults thrive (Hellman, Worley, & Munoz, 2016).

### Why Focus on Hope?

- Hope is one of the best predictors of well-being. (Magaletta & Oliver, 1999)
- Turns out that how we act and feel today is tied to how we feel about tomorrow.
- High-hope individuals have less risk of anxiety, depression, and substance use. (Aldridge, & Villodas, 2010)
- Hope can be learned. There are proven strategies, interventions, and approaches to increasing one’s level of hope. (Snyder, 2003)
- To date, there are approximately 2,000 published studies investigating hope, going back to the early 1990s.

In 1991, psychologist Charles Snyder, Ph.D., and his colleagues developed a body of research called Hope Theory. In this conception of hope, we aren’t talking about a vague emotion, but rather a specific state of mind that arises from setting desirable goals, having clear pathways to reach those goals, and believing in our own abilities.

Let’s dig a little deeper into the three components of hope:

#### **1. A desired future that calls us forward and energizes us. (Goals)**

Hope is built from the goals that matter to us, that fill our minds with what could be; a future that draws us forward. According to Hope Theory, a goal can be anything that an individual desires to experience, create, obtain, accomplish, learn, or become. Goals are something we have each day when we wake up and can range from small, like getting to school on-time, to big life goals.

Being authentically energized by a goal cannot be forced on anyone. Yet caring adults can help a young person **uncover and discover** goals that create a spark of hope - that have meaning and purpose for that individual.

BYS counseling, tutoring, and career exploration programs all aim to support students as they discover and work toward goals that matter to them.

## **2. The knowledge that there are many paths to achieving what is important to me, and I may have to adjust along the way. (Pathways)**

Challenges and obstacles are part of being human, and yet so many of us believe that challenges and obstacles shouldn't exist. Hopeful people accept this fact and can identify multiple pathways toward moving toward a goal.

Supportive relationships are key in working skillfully with obstacles, as we need each other when the going gets rough. Often solutions to our challenges are more easily seen by others who care about us. Being supported can also help us keep motivated when we feel like quitting.

BYS counseling and tutoring programs support students in getting unstuck and moving toward their self-defined goals. Life Design workshops teach creative problem-solving skills that can be used in the pursuit of personal, academic, or professional goals.

## **3. A belief that we can shape our own lives and do what is necessary to achieve our goals. (Agency)**

To be the author of our own story takes ongoing energy or willpower. Yet willpower is finite.

To keep willpower alive takes recharging our batteries on a routine basis and knowing where we are putting our attention. Distractions, like hunger or the frequent checking of a cellphone each time it pings, can drain our energy from what matters most. Mindfulness and stress-reduction skills support hope, as they create awareness of where we put our limited time, energy, and attention.

BYS counseling programs, leadership training, and social media messages promote mindfulness and other stress-reduction tools. Snacks are always available as no student can learn when hungry.

## **Measuring Hope**

Bainbridge Youth Services uses a validated instrument, the Children's Hope Scale, to evaluate the impact of our major programs on the beliefs and abilities that increase levels of hope. (Snyder et al., 1997)

## **BYS Aspirational Aim**

Fostering Hope is now part of the BYS strategic plan approved in September 2019. (link to plan). We look for opportunities to engage students who are low to slightly hopeful and provide pathways to higher Hope. Our aspirational vision is that by 2025, all graduating high school seniors on Bainbridge Island will score “highly hopeful” on the Healthy Youth Survey’s Hope Scale.

## **Other Important Info about Hope**

- High Hope is never a constant and isn’t linear. We can be hopeful in one area of our life but not in another.
- During times of great adversity, hope may be very hard to find and this is when support is needed most.
- No matter how hard we try, we can achieve some goals but not others. Goals sometimes need to be changed to make them realistic.

## **Creating a legacy of Hope**

We can all foster hope in ourselves and we can teach it to children around us. Studies suggest that we learn hopeful, goal-directed thinking in the context of other people. Children most often learn hope from their parents but all relationships that are characterized by boundaries, consistency, and support can foster the growth of hope.

*It is hope that gives life meaning. And hope is based on the prospect of being able one day to turn the actual world into a possible one that looks better.*

*Francois Jacob*