

Chapter 12

The Promotion of Hope in Children and Youth

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12.1 The Promotion of Hope in Children and Youth

It is theorized that children are hopeful and that they report higher hope than most adults (Marques and Lopez 2014; Snyder 1994). Although the school years should be among the most hopeful in student's lives, recent research suggests that hope is moderate during late childhood (ages 10–13), declining from late childhood to adolescence (ages 14–17), with only people 65 year and older reporting lower levels than adolescence during the entire lifespan (Marques and Lopez 2014). This finding seems to imply that children and adolescents are ideal targets for programs and interventions aimed at fostering hope. This chapter briefly review details how hope construct is meaningful, measureable, and malleable via intentional change efforts.

12.2 Hope Theory and 20 Years of Research

Hope, the ideas and energy for the future, is one of the most potent predictors of success of our youth. Earlier writers have defined hope as an unidimensional construct involving an overall perception that one's goals can be met (French 1952; Lewin 1935; Menninger 1959; Stotland 1969). In the past decade, the prevailing scholarly view of hope (Snyder 1994) has gone beyond wishful thinking to an understanding of how multi-dimensional intentional thought leads to adaptive action. C. R. Snyder and colleagues (1991) developed a psychological theory and cognitive motivational

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model of hope that is based in goal-directed thinking. Hope theory involves a person capacity to (a) clearly conceptualize goals (goals thinking), (b) develop the specific strategies to reach those goals (pathways thinking), and (c) initiate and sustain the motivation for using those strategies (agency thinking). “I’ll find a way to get this done!”, “I can do this”, “I am not going to be stopped” are examples of hope messages. Pathways and agency thinking are stronger in high-hope individuals – as compared to low-hope people – and it is especially evident when the goals are important and when people are confronted with challenges or obstacles.

Over the last 20 years, researchers have gained a clearer understanding of the relationships between hope and important aspects of students’ lives. Put simply, research demonstrates that more hopeful students do better in school and life than less hopeful students. Some relevant findings with children and youth demonstrate that hope is positively associated with perceived competence, self-worth, life satisfaction and well-being (e.g., Gilman et al. 2006; Marques et al. 2007), and negatively associated with symptoms of depression (Snyder et al. 1997b). High hope students typically are more optimistic (Snyder et al. 1997b), develop many life goals, and perceive themselves as being capable of solving problems that may arise (Snyder et al. 1997b).

Hope is not significantly related to native intelligence (Snyder et al. 2002) or income (Gallup 2009a), but instead is linked consistently to attendance and credits earned (Gallup 2009b) and academic achievement (Lopez et al. 2014). Specifically, hopeful middle school students have better grades in core subjects (Marques et al. 2011b) and scores on achievement tests (Snyder et al. 1997a). Hopeful high school students (Gallup 2009a; Snyder et al. 1991; Worrell and Hale 2001) and beginning college students (Gallagher and Lopez 2008; Snyder et al. 2002) have higher overall grade point averages. In these studies, the predictive power of hope remained significant even when controlling for intelligence (Snyder et al. 1997a), prior grades (Gallagher and Lopez 2008; Snyder et al. 1991; Snyder et al. 2002), self-esteem (Snyder et al. 2002), and entrance examination scores (Gallagher and Lopez 2008; Snyder et al. 2002).

Higher hope has been correlated positively with social competence (Barnum et al. 1998), pleasure in getting to know others, enjoyment in frequent interpersonal interactions (Snyder et al. 1997b), and interest in the goal pursuits of others (Snyder et al. 1997a). Hope also plays a role in children’s health such as adherence to treatment among asthma patients (Berg et al. 2007). On the other hand, hopelessness (i.e. negative expectations about oneself and one’s future, Beck et al. 1974) is an important predictor of violence, aggressive behaviour, substance use, sexual behaviour, and accidental injury among adolescents (Bolland 2003).

12.3 Measuring Hope in Children and Youth Across Cultures

Hope can be detected in action by someone who knows a child well. Daily conversations, letters, stories, games, poems, diaries, journal entries are some of the most meaningful ways to determine individuals’ hope. Additionally, there are various

self-reported measures of hope that can facilitate hope assessment. We describe the two most widely used scales (which are in the public domain) to measure the trait aspect of hope (i.e., as a relatively stable personality disposition).

The Children's Hope Scale (CHS) developed by Snyder et al. (1997b) is a trait hope measure for children ages 7 through 14 years. The scale is comprised of three agency (e.g., "I am doing just as well as other kids my age") and three pathways items (e.g., "When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it"). The CHS has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties when used with physically and psychologically healthy children from public schools, boys diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, children with various medical problems, children under treatment for cancer or asthma, child burn victims, adolescents with sickle-cell disease, and early adolescents exposed to violence (Snyder et al. 1997b). Besides the original version from Snyder et al. (1997a), this scale has been translated and validated to Portuguese (Marques et al. 2009) and Spanish languages (McDermott et al. 1997). Hope levels are similar between the Portuguese and the English language versions. Children from both countries ascribed the hopeful content to themselves "a lot of the time" (Marques et al. 2009; Snyder et al. 1997a). Among different ethnic groups, it appears that while not statistically significant, Caucasians tend to report fewer obstacles in their lives than their ethnic minority counterparts. However, minority groups have been shown to produce higher average hope scores than Caucasians (e.g., McDermott et al. 1997; Snyder et al. 1997a).

To measure the trait aspect of hope in adolescents (and adults) ages 15 and older, Snyder et al. (1991) developed the Hope Scale (HS). This scale consists of four items measuring agency (e.g., "I energetically pursue my goals"), four items measuring pathways (e.g., "There are lots of ways around any problem"), and four distracter items. This scale has been used with a wide range of samples and has exhibited acceptable psychometric properties. Besides the original version from Snyder et al. (1991), the HS has been translated and validated into different languages, including Portuguese (Marques and Pais-Ribeiro 2006), Dutch (Carifio and Rhodes 2002), French (Dube et al. 2000), Slovak (Halama 2001), Chinese (Ho 2003), Korean (Yun 2003), and Arabic (Abdel-Khalek and Snyder 2007). Higher hope, as measured by the Hope Scale, seems to relate to similar psychological profiles for the English, Portuguese, Dutch, French, Slovak, Chinese, Korean, and Arabic speaking people.

There are additional ways to measure hope besides observation and the use of the CHS/HS. The Gallup Student Poll (GSP) is an online school-based measure of student hope (and engagement and well-being). The survey and the dates to be administered by interested schools are available at the gallupstudentpoll.com website. The following items were used to measure hope in the GSP:

- I know I will graduate from high school.
- There is an adult in my life who cares about my future.
- I can think of many ways to get good grades.
- I energetically pursue my goals.
- I can find lots of ways around any problem.
- I know I will find a good job after I graduate.

Findings from this latter survey, based on convenience and representative samples, demonstrate that half of American students are hopeful, meaning they have many future ideas and goals and strategies and energy to get the things done. The other half of students do not have the hope they need to succeed (Gallup 2009b). These stuck (33 %) or discouraged (17 %) students may lack the energy to pursue goals and often give up when facing obstacles because they can't find alternative pathways or can't get the support they need to overcome obstacles. Moreover, failure in hopeless students is not used to improve performances in the future (Onwuegbuzie 1998) and may result in frustration, loss of confidence and lowered self-esteem (Snyder 1994).

12.4 Promoting Hope in Children and Youth Across Cultures

Over the last 10 years, researchers have developed programs or interventions aims to enhance hope in children and youth. These programs (e.g., Lopez et al. 2000; Marques et al. 2011a) have demonstrated that hope can be cultivated and despite students with the least hope tend to benefit most from hope interventions (Bouwkamp 2001), research shows that virtually all students raise their hope levels when taking part in school hope programs (Lopez et al. 2000; Marques et al. 2011a).

12.4.1 The Role of Parents and Teachers in Foster Students Hope

Given that hope is malleable and that the hopeless can learn to be hopeful, our youth need a focused effort from people who care about them and their future. Parents are the first important agents to impact children's hope. They model hope by the way they communicate ("hopeful language" in the every day life, such as "when you finish your homework we can go out" instead of "if you can finish your homework we can go out"), set goals, view challenges and cope with problems. In the same manner, teachers play an important role in children's perceptions about their competences to achieve goals and to cope with obstacles that can arise. For example, educators should provide help students develop the capacity to think about the future in a complex way, develop flexible thinking about how to attain future goals, and how to renew motivation when willpower is depleted. Additionally, being a high-hope parent and teacher facilitates children's hopeful thinking, and school psychologists are well positioned to facilitate this hope transmission. See Appendix A for some suggestions to work and refine with teachers and parents to enhance children's hope. For more detailed information about imparting goal setting as well as pathways and agency thinking to students, parents and teachers see McDermott and Snyder (1999, 2000), Snyder et al. (2002) or Lopez et al. (2009).

Besides parents and teachers, there are other significant influences on children's hope, such as peer groups. It is important that parents stay in touch with these influences and be active participants in their children's interests. Hope transmission between peers' interactions should also be a focus of attention in hope development. In this regard, we suggest the inclusion of peers when adults intentionally work on children's hope.

By integrating hope into curriculum or doing separate and regular hope-enhancing group sessions, the school is an ideal place to work in groups and include peers. It is possible to find ways to infuse hopeful thinking into the subject matter that children are studying. For example, history is replete with high-hope people, and students may be oriented to explore their goals, the problems that had to be overcome, and the initiative and energy it took to achieve their objectives. In literature, teachers can benefit from personal narratives and can assign short stories to illustrate the hope process. In mathematics, teachers can infuse hope and at the same time may reduce math anxiety, a problem that frequently inhibit the learning of relevant skills (Snyder 1999). For this purpose, it is important to teach the concepts in small steps and praise the child's comprehension of each step, giving a special emphasis on their efforts besides their achievements. In fact, mathematics may be one of the most strategic subjects where the steps to enhance hope described in Appendix A can produce benefits in learning and in reducing math anxiety. Physical education is also a critical area because the goals and movement toward them are visually perceived.

School professionals may implement group programs to infuse hope in children by including all the class (for some proposals, see the Sect. 12.4.2), and with a collaboration effort, psychologists, teachers, parents and school administrators can build an hope-inducing school atmosphere.

12.4.2 Helping Students Capitalize on Their Strengths and Build Hope

Helping students capitalize on their strengths, may be one of the most successful ways to improve the conditions that promote learning and grow.

The Clifton Strengths Finder, an online measure of personal talent that identifies areas where an individual's greatest potential for building strengths exists, initiates a strengths-based development process in work and academic settings, and findings in the school setting suggest the efficacy of strengths development interventions in fostering students' hope and engagement at school (Lopez and Calderon 2011; Lopez and Louis 2009).

Other efforts to foster hope in children and youth include the "Making Hope Happen Program" (Lopez et al. 2000) designed and implemented with U.S. students and the "Building Hope for the Future – A Program to Foster Strengths in Middle-School Students" (Marques et al. 2011a) designed and implemented with Portuguese students. These programs were designed for a group format delivered over five weekly sessions,

to help students to (1) conceptualize clear goals; (2) produce numerous range of pathways to attainment; (3) summon the mental energy to maintain the goal pursuit; and (4) reframe seemingly insurmountable obstacles as challenges to be overcome.

The “Building Hope for the Future” (BHF) is a social-ecological program that comprises five 1-h sessions with students and direct work with key stakeholders such as parents, teachers and school peers (1 h during the first week of the students’ intervention). See Appendix B for the contents of the BHF program.

A first implementation and examination of this program with Portuguese middle-schoolers, their parents, teachers and school peers (Marques et al. 2011a) revealed that students in the intervention group increased hope, life satisfaction and self-worth for at least, 1-year and 6-months after the program. The matched comparison group demonstrated no change in hope, life satisfaction and self-worth from baseline to post- or follow-up assessments. Results suggest that an intervention designed to foster hope in middle schoolers, with the collaboration of key stakeholders (parents, teachers and peers) can produce psychological benefits, by increasing hope, life satisfaction and self-worth. These findings are consistent with previous interventions to enhance goal-directed thinking. For example, the “Making Hope Happen Program” (Lopez et al. 2000) produced increases in hope across different school grade levels. Moreover, BHF strongly support the application of group-based approaches for raising the hopeful thinking of all students (e.g., the curriculum and school environment for students could be arranged and improved in the direction of supporting hopeful thinking). Finally, this intervention has the potential to address issues of efficacy, accessibility (students, teachers, and parents) and sustainability (low cost to deliver in a group-setting and with 5 weeks only).

12.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we presented the fundamentals of hope theory to our school-based psychology colleagues around the world. A brief literature review details how hope construct is meaningful, measurable, and malleable via intentional change efforts.

It probably is accurate to say that all students, independently of their culture and language, need support from parents, school, community to build their energy and ideas for the future. As such, we hope to encourage researchers, psychologists and school educators to keep hope alive in our schools and in our worldwide students.

Appendix A: Some Suggestions to Work and Refine with Teachers and Parents to Enhance Children’s Hope

- Let teachers and parents know that children build hope through learning to trust in the ordered predictability and consistency of children interactions with them.
- Explain the importance of being firm, fair, and consistent in engendering hope among their children.

- Explain the importance of creating an atmosphere of trust, where students are responsible for their actions and supported to establish growth-inducing stretch goals.
- Emphasize that children should be praised and rewarded for both their efforts and achievements.
- Encourage teachers and parents goals that are made concrete, understandable, and are broken down into subgoals.
- Work with them to focus on long-range as opposed to short-term goals.
- Emphasize the importance of preparation and planning.
- Develop an atmosphere where students are focused on expending effort and mastering the information rather than a sole focus on obtaining good outcomes (e.g., high grades or stellar athletic records).
- Encourage an atmosphere through a give and take process between teachers/parents and students.
- Teachers should be encouraged to remain engaged and invested in pursuing their own important interests and life goals outside of the classroom.
- Let them know that being a hopeful adult has many benefits. High-hope people perform better at work (Peterson and Byron 1997), have higher well-being (Gallagher and Lopez 2009), and live longer (Stern et al. 2001).

Appendix B: Content of the BHF

Sessions with Students

Session 1: Learning about Hope

Goals. The primary goal of this session is to improve the students' understanding of hope theory and its relevance to the change process and to achieve positive outcomes.

Content. This session offers the participants an overview of the topic of hope, including its three components (pathways, agency and goals). Additionally, the central role that hope plays in daily communication is addressed by learning, identifying and practicing the vocabulary used in the model.

Example of an exercise. The students are asked to acting out the hope picture.

Session 2: Structuring Hope

Goals. A major goal of this session is students learn to recognize pathways and agency components of hope, and obstacles to a goal attainment. In addition, this session aims to help students build or identify personal goals (salient and attainable) they could work with for the next 4 weeks.

Content. This session encompasses three important elements, the discussion of stories and goal-oriented characters, the brainstorm of goal-oriented ideas from the past life and the identification of present goals they would like to work.

Example of an exercise. Participants are asked to identify goals, obstacles, pathways and agency, first from stories or past situations of their real life, and after from present situations they would like to work with the hope buddy.

Session 3: Creating Positive and Specific Goals

Goals. The goals of this session is to practice the model, refine personal workable goals in order to be more specific, positive and clearer, create multiple pathways and identify agency thoughts for each personal goal.

Content. First, the introduction of new narratives and group activities offers the participants to reinforce and practice the model. This session also draws on the progress of personal goals and collaboration can occur to adjust or modify any disparities in actions or thinking that may hinder the successful achievement of the desired goals.

Example of an exercise. Participants are asked to reorganize goals in a “goal enhancer worksheet” by making it more specific and positive.

Session 4: Practice Makes Perfect

Goals. The goals of this session are to judge, identify and create an “hopeful talk”; to reinforce the hope model; and to review and introduce personal workable goals in a personal hope story.

Content. Hopefulness communication patterns, as well as hopeful communication behavior are presented and supervised role plays to help students better identify and understand hopefulness and hopeful voices is reinforced. The progress of personal goals is continually monitored.

Example of an exercise. Each student is asked to share with the buddy the progress of his/her goal through a “Hope Buddy Journal”.

Session 5: Review and Apply for the Future

Goals. The primary goal of this session is to enhance exchange of personal hope stories and to plan future steps.

Content. This session proposes to the students the exchange with the group how they implement the hope theory to their unique life experiences. The process over achievement is emphasized as well as the next steps in the goal process.

Example of an exercise. Participants are encouraged to evaluate the process and discuss next steps with the hope buddy and finally share his/her personally hope story with the rest of the group.

Shared Considerations across the five-sessions

- Each session started with a 10 min segment dedicated to modeling and developing enthusiasm for the program and to reinforcing ideas learned in the previous session.
- The sessions are based on the theoretical and applied work of Snyder and colleagues (e.g., Lopez et al. 2000; Snyder 1994; Snyder et al. 2002; McDermott and Snyder 1999).
- The sessions integrate solution-focused, narrative and cognitive-behavioral techniques.
- The sessions offer psycho-educational, skills training and group process components, and include structured activities, roleplaying, brainstorming, and guided discussion.
- The program is designed to be controlled for adult attention, group cohesion, social support, the discussion of hope components, sharing thoughts and feelings with peers, and engagement in session’s activities.

Session with Parents and Teachers

The direct work with parents and teachers is supported by a manual designed to: (1) increase parents and teachers awareness of the principles of hope and enhance their goal-setting behavior; and (2) promote goal-setting behavior in their children/students. This manual has three sections: The first section is dedicated to “Learning about hope” (e.g., hope concept, research on hope, how hope can be cultivated, reflection questions). The second section is the “Instilling Hope” section and participants are first oriented to a “Hope Finding” (e.g., self-evaluation with the Hope Scale from Snyder et al. 1991) and next to a “Hope Bonding” (how to build hopeful relationships). The third section, “Increasing Hope”, is dedicated to “Hope Enhancing” (this segment provides basic steps associated with hope enhancement) and “Hope Reminding” (this segment provides strategies and practical exercises to improve their own hope and in their children/students).

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