

## What Actualization looks like in Adolescence

### ACTUALIZATION

The process of a youth visualizing future goals and establishing permanent connections as they define them. Actualization is an evolving process that does not necessarily have an “end state”.

#### What does actualization look like in adolescence? What will we see and hear?

Youth can express the pain from losses without having to use extreme behaviors. They are able to seek comfort and support from others and are often better able to manage change without excessive frustration. They will express how past events made them the person they are today, and they are able to tell their story to those who they trust.

Greater levels of reciprocity in relationships (the give and take of love and caring) will be evident. The teen will enjoy interactions with peers and can maintain their own identity when with their peers. The youth will maintain relationships, be more willing to embrace parenting relationships, and may also continue their connections with previous caregivers.

Youth will seek advice and support from safe parenting or caregiving figures, while showing age appropriate autonomy. They can see how to handle current and future situations that pose challenges. The youth will show more confidence in their ability to take steps towards the future.



#### What practices support or interfere with actualization?

Help teens feel more secure in their identity by allowing them to be who they are. Understand the importance of respecting the youth’s vision of themselves and remember, identity formation means trying on lots of “hats”.

Avoid an over-focus on preventing “bad” decisions. Fighting against a teen’s decisions only creates more separation between you and the teen, and reduces your influence on them. Instead of presenting choices as “good” or “bad, frame choices as options that have different outcomes that will need to be considered.

Experience creates competence and confidence in decision-making, especially for teens. Create opportunities for teens to learn from both successes and mistakes. Help the teen see how one setback does not have to interfere with achieving their overall goals.

Keep in mind that planning is harder when you haven’t had a lot of experience. Without lecturing, talk about how decisions today can impact possibilities of tomorrow. Provide anticipatory guidance, but remember the decision is still theirs to make.

Using ultimatums, threats, lectures, or trying to talk youth out of something are techniques that exert “power over” the youth and can replicate traumatic experiences that will keep them in a reactive state. These strategies also send the message that their ideas are not valid. Instead, affirm the youth’s feelings and thoughts and offer opportunities for further exploration.

Stop trying to manipulate and control the process. Think of yourself as a consultant—offer ideas and share what you are worried about, but try to accept the teen’s decisions as much as possible. Even when you don’t agree with it, affirming a decision by saying something like, “I know you’ve made this decision for a reason that is very important to you” shows that you value the youth.



# Activity

# Stepping Stones

## PURPOSE

- to help the teen practice planning steps
- to support the development of insight into what supports the youth will need to achieve future goals
- to help create competence and confidence in decision-making

## MATERIALS

Paper, markers or colored pencils/pens.



## GETTING STARTED

Create a drawing with the youth of a series of “stones” that lead from one point to another, creating a winding “path” between the two points.

Ask the youth to describe the current “stone”. Next ask the youth to consider what the last “stone” looks like. This may be a future state that is in the relative near future, or this may be something that is a longer-term future state or goal. Remembering the fluid and dynamic nature of goals and future-vision during adolescence. Don’t be afraid to brainstorm even those ideas that seem unrealistic to you.

Next talk with the youth about what they think each “step” between the current and future states may be. Keep in mind that planning is harder when you haven’t had a lot of experience. Remember that all of the teen’s experiences, both positive and negative, are valuable learning opportunities. Ask about how the youth has made decisions in the past and help them reflect on what they learned from these decisions.

## TIPS AND TECHNIQUES TO MAKING THE ACTIVITY MEANINGFUL

Remember that the teen’s priorities may be different than yours or those of the system; and theirs are the only ones that matter. Allow the youth to envision lots of possibilities as they work through the activity.

Along the way, helping the youth identify important people who can help with the steps along the path. Practice ways that the youth might ask others for help. What would that look like? How would they decide who to ask? Remind the youth that simply asking for another person’s ideas or suggestions is a form of help, even if they decide not to act on those ideas or suggestions.

Consider how development impacts teen’s perceptions of the world. Teens tend to live in the moment, so it is just as important to embrace the present as much as it is to consider the future.

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## TASKS

- Clarification
- Integration
- Actualization

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## QUESTIONS

- Who am I?
- What happened to me?
- Where am I going?
- How will I get there?
- When will I know I belong?

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## SKILLS

- **RECOGNIZING** and **ACCEPTING** that current **BEHAVIORS** reflect **GRIEF RESPONSES**
- **BEING PRESENT** to the individual
- Providing **OPPORTUNITIES** to **EXPLORE** feelings and life events
- **AFFIRMING** perceptions and feelings
- **LISTENING** to the stories
- **BRIEFLY SPEAKING** in response to questions, comments, and reactions of individual
- Establishing the perception of **SAFETY**