

PEACE POWER TOOLS

(www.peacepower.info)

Finding a Passion

Summary:

Youth who find a “passion”—a prosocial or positive activity that they find truly rewarding—generally allocate much of their time to that activity, and therefore naturally spend less time involved in negative or antisocial behavior. That activity may be academic, recreational, sports, relationship, artistic, or many other kinds of behavior. Involvement in such activities often both provide pleasure and offer opportunities for positive interactions with others, including adults. Particularly useful are activities that lead to relationships with positive role models.

Resources Needed:

- Depend on activity

Implementation Steps:

- Exposure to possibilities is sometimes an important first step, and experimentation is often required to find the right activity for an individual; see module on Activity Sampling for information about how to support such experimentation
- Once a possible “passion” has been identified, provide encouragement and hope that accessing the desired activities is possible
- Work with the young person to identify possible obstacles and jointly develop plans to address those, taking an optimistic stance that communicates belief in the young person’s capacities
- Follow up to determine whether the plan was successful, or if additional steps may be necessary
- Be prepared to assist again if the young person’s interests change

Variations:

It is often easier for young people to attempt something new if they do it with one or more peers; youth can therefore be encouraged to identify a friend that might accompany them at least in the beginning.

Rationale and Evidence Base:

There is a well-established behavioral principle called the “matching law” that demonstrates that decreases in one behavior are highly predictable when a “competing” behavior increases; this principle can be captured in a mathematical formula. Whenever two behaviors cannot be done at the same time, the one that pays off most richly will be engaged in the most. This principle appears to apply to many kinds of behavior, including that done by oneself as well as social behavior. If few rewards are available for prosocial behavior, levels of antisocial behavior will predictably be high; if many rewards are available for prosocial activities, antisocial behavior will be lower. (Rates of negative behavior are seldom zero; all youth engage in some of that. At the same time, reducing the overall rate also typically reduces the intensity of negative behavior as well.)

Goldstein, A. P. (1999). *Low level aggression: First steps on the ladder to violence*. Champaign, IL: Research Press.

Mattaini, M. A. (2001). *Peace power for adolescents: Strategies for a culture of nonviolence*. Washington, D.C: NASW Press.

McDowell, J. J. (1988). Matching theory in natural human environments. *The Behavior Analyst*, 11, 95-109.

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