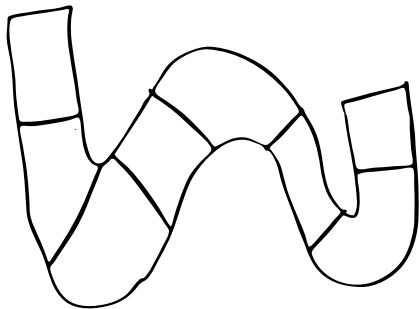


# Activity: Mapping: Young People's Pathways

This activity is designed to guide conversations you might have with young people about their life and career goals—namely, how they set their goals and understand the steps toward them, including challenges and opportunities they anticipate facing along the way.

**Time: 30-45 minutes, depending on the size of your group**



A full page [pathway worksheet](#) is available at the end of this activity.



**A similar exercise used in the Striving to Thriving research focus groups unlocked key insights into young people's ability to conceptualize their goals and make a plan to achieve them.**

*Below are detailed steps on how to use the pathways worksheet to engage young people in conversation about their futures.*

## STEP 1: INTRODUCE THE ACTIVITY

Print one worksheet for every young person in your group.\* Set out colored markers and regular writing pens for each person. Introduce the activity and be transparent about why you are doing the exercise.

### You May Consider Using or Adapting the Following Script:

- *In this activity, you will explore your goals and imagine the steps you might take to get there.*
- *On this worksheet is a curvy path with blank boxes that you can fill in—kind of like a Game of Life.*
- *Imagine that you are walking on this path. At one end of the path write the kind of job, work, or career that you would like to do someday. That is your goal.*
- *Now write down where you are starting from. You can start anywhere.*

\* Each participant can determine the orientation of their pathway (E.g. vertical or horizontal).

This pathway activity and script was originally developed by Goodwin Simon Strategic Research as part of the Striving to Thriving research project. The activity has been adapted by Equitable Futures as part of the Designing Pathways with Young People Toolkit.

## STEP 2: EXPLORE STEPS, STAGES, AND EXPERIENCES

Once everyone in the group has had an opportunity to write down their starting point and their goal(s), ask them to fill in the spaces (steps, stages, and experiences) in between.

### You May Consider Using or Adapting the Following Script:

- *Now take a few minutes and fill in the spaces that describe how you might get from where you are now to where you want to be.*
- *Feel free to include any things in your life that led you to where you are now. If you wish, you can use the colored pens as well as the pen provided.*
- *What do you imagine are the steps, stages, or experiences that have to happen in order for you to get there?*
- *What supports or resources will you need to move successfully through your pathway and reach your goals?*

### Follow Up Prompts:

After the group has had a few minutes to work independently, you may choose to follow up with the following prompts or you can design your own based on what you want to learn about young people's experiences or future aspirations. Encourage them to write inside or outside of the boxes as they continue to respond to your prompts and add detail to their pathway.

- *What kind of education, school, training, or certification do you feel you might need along your pathway?*
- *What kinds of people will you meet along the way? What role will each person play?*

## STEP 3. IDENTIFY CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

When you can see that the group has responded to your earlier prompts and the worksheets are beginning to look full and rich with detail, you can ask young people about the challenges and barriers they have already experienced or anticipate experiencing as they make their way toward their goal(s).

### You May Consider Using or Adapting the Following Script:

- *Now take a few minutes and consider the barriers or challenges you might face in order to reach your goals. What are the things you might have to avoid or overcome to stay on your pathway and get to your goal(s)?*

### Suggested Follow Up Prompts:

- *What do you imagine will be the resources, information, or supports you will need to overcome these challenges/barriers?*
- *Are there specific people who you think will play an important role in your success?*

After the group has responded to these final prompts, give them a minute or so to review their pathway and add any finishing touches before putting down their pens.

## STEP 4: SHARE WITH PEERS

Go around the room and ask each young person to share their pathway with the full group. While sharing, they should talk through their full pathway by holding it up so everyone can see it or by walking the group through each step. For example, a young person may share: “My goal is x. I put myself here because I am currently in high school. The next step is x. I will need to learn x in order to do y.” You can find example pathways and pathway narratives in the Striving to Thriving report.

After each young person describes their pathway, you may choose to probe on specific ideas or concepts. We recommend reflecting young people’s own language as you construct probes or discussion questions (e.g., if they use the term ‘racism’, use this term instead of ‘discrimination’ or ‘bias’).

### Some Examples of Ideas or Concepts That May Come up in Discussion Include the Following:

**Support.** Young people often use the word ‘support’ to describe the role of people in their lives, but this word means different things to different people. Ask what kind of support they think they will need and who can or will provide that? Where might they look for that support?

**Discrimination and Bias.** Young people often feel that their racial, ethnic, cultural, or gender identity will benefit them as they move toward their future goals. Many also worry about discrimination and bias. It may be important to learn more about what systemic inequalities they expect to experience and how they believe this may impact their trajectories.

**Entrepreneurship.** Many young people feel positively about the prospect of ‘doing or owning their own thing or business,’ ‘being their own boss,’ or ‘having a side hustle.’

**Thriving.** Most young people see themselves thriving in their future lives. They are excited to talk about the way they imagine their lives unfolding and how it will feel to achieve their goals—the kind of life they want to live and the quality of life that they feel is most important. In many cases, young people are motivated by the life they imagine living and less by the type of work they imagine doing.



### Using This Activity in a Group or Individual Context

This activity was originally developed for use in groups of six to eight young people moderated by a neutral adult who helped to facilitate the presentation of each pathway and the discussion that followed. However, the activity can also be conducted with one young person responding to one adult or in a small group discussion between near peers and peers. In a small group context, researchers found that it was beneficial to involve young people with a diversity of aspirations and goals, including young people whose goals are more and less clearly defined. Researchers heard from young people that they appreciated the opportunity to be in conversation with peers they perceive to be different from them, and they also valued opportunities to both learn from and teach their peers.

## STEP 6: REFLECTIONS AND APPRECIATIONS

After each young person has shared their pathway and you've had a chance to explore specific themes or ideas that they raise, consider bringing the group together to reflect on their experience doing the pathways activity.

### You Might Consider the Following Reflection Questions:

- *As your peers were sharing, what did you hear? What stands out to you?*
- *Did you learn anything new about yourself or others? If so, what?*
- *What is your overall takeaway from this?*
- *We've talked about a lot today, what are you left thinking about? What are you curious about or left wondering?*
- *What questions do you have?*
- *Thank the group for sharing their thinking and their aspirations with you and their peers and then end the activity.*

## STEP 7: NEXT STEPS

Now that you have a better idea of how the young people with whom you work think about their future lives and goals, you may want to think about how this new information can be an input to program design and assessment. Move on to our activity, APPLYING: FIVE OCCUPATIONAL PATHWAYS, for next steps.

You may also consider periodically checking back in with the young people from this group to revisit their pathways worksheets. You can ask additional reflection questions to help young people assess how they are moving along their pathway, as well as how their experience in your program is helping them achieve their life goals.



### Adaptations of This Activity

You may find this exercise helpful for use in the following additional contexts:

*With young adults who have begun working to help them forecast where they want to go*

*With adults who work with young people to help them explore their own understandings of what they believe to be the pathways of the young people they serve*

*With parents/guardians of young people to help them explore their own understandings of the pathways for their child(ren) and how to provide them support*

