



# GOALS 4GOOD

## Values to Transform Our World

A framework for student wellbeing and a healthier planet

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**Acknowledgements:**

Global Action Plan is grateful to the following people for their help: Professor Tim Kasser, Jonathan Bagga-ley, Dr Elly Hanson and Dr Morgan Phillips.

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## Who we are

Global Action Plan is a charity that is working for a world in which we can all live happily without ruining the Earth we depend on. We are experts in helping people live more sustainable lifestyles, and do this by making connections between what is good for people and good for the planet. We are the people behind Clean Air Day, the UK's largest air pollution campaign. We work with young people to reduce consumerism and increase wellbeing, focussing on the forces that drive hyper-consumption. And we bring business and young people together to work on a sustainable future, helping young people develop the skills and knowledge to tackle environmental issues.

## Introduction

All organisations that work with young people want to give them the best chance to be successful, to reach their potential and live a fulfilled life. There is now increasing recognition that to achieve this, organisations must aim to develop young people's character as well as their academic and professional performance. Young people must be supported to increase their resilience and learn strategies to keep themselves mentally and physically healthy. They must also be equipped to become responsible, respectful, active citizens who contribute positively to society. This paper offers a framework grounded in the academic literature on values and goals to support organisations that work with young people to meet both these objectives.

Decades of research now show us that what we choose to aspire to in life has a profound impact on our own wellbeing, our local communities and the living world. Setting goals that place importance on personal growth, strong relationships and contribution to wider communities have been shown to be successful strategies for a flourishing life while encouraging active citizenship.

Yet these do not tend to be the types of aspirations promoted to young people in our culture. Young people are growing up at a time where advertising and media encourage them to be excessively preoccupied with how they look, what they own - and to chase approval through "likes" on social media. Enticing visions of "success" are promoted by glossy celebrities and influencers, offering a taste of their lifestyle through the latest product they are promoting. Young people are relentlessly targeted with these messages from the moment they wake up to the time they go to bed; as they walk past billboards, work on their laptops, watch TV and of course browse on their ever-present mobile phones.

But decades of research now show us that this high gloss, high consumption version of success is harmful to their wellbeing, discourages active citizenship and is destroying our living world<sup>1,2</sup>. It can be challenging for organisations that work with young people to counteract the messages espoused by these powerful cultural forces and to support them to choose healthier aspirations in life that are good for them, good for society and good for the planet.

The good news is that research is also demonstrating that it is possible to steer young people towards healthier goals in life and when this happens, their wellbeing increases<sup>3</sup>; they are less likely to suffer with psychological ill-health<sup>4</sup> and they are more likely to behave in environmentally and socially responsible ways. Youth social action that is grounded in intrinsic values is also much more likely to be sustained. This is because that person is taking action because they care about the cause at hand (an intrinsic motivation), as opposed to taking action for a reward, such as a prize, a grade, a line for a CV, or a boost to their social status (all extrinsic motivations).

This paper lays out the theoretical framework that underpins Global Action Plan's work to enable teachers to support young people to be more resilient to an increasingly toxic culture of looks, likes, and shopping, by embedding the values of responsible citizenship and environmental stewardship. Promoting these values and goals will be essential in protecting their wellbeing, promoting youth social action, and equipping young people to confront climate breakdown and shape a society that thrives within our planet's boundaries.

## Goals and values

### What are Goals?

Goals are the way we intentionally direct our lives to fit with our ideal vision of who we want to be. We can set ourselves short term goals (e.g. I want to get an A in my biology exam) or long-term goals which direct our lives over a longer period of time (e.g. I want to become a doctor). Having goals to strive for, and making progress towards them is very important for our sense of wellbeing<sup>5</sup>. Goals give us a sense of purpose and a reason for being, they add structure and meaning to our daily lives<sup>6</sup>. Making progress towards our goals enhances our sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy<sup>7</sup>.

The goals we choose to pursue in life reflect our personal vision of what a successful life looks like, which is grounded in our values.

### What are Values?

Our values are our beliefs about what is important and what makes a good life<sup>8</sup>. Our values influence all the choices we make in our lives: the job we do, the friends we choose, the news we read, how we spend our money and what we do in our leisure time. They inform our beliefs about the kind of society we would like to live in and our political persuasion.

Research suggests there are two categories of values we tend to hold<sup>9</sup>:

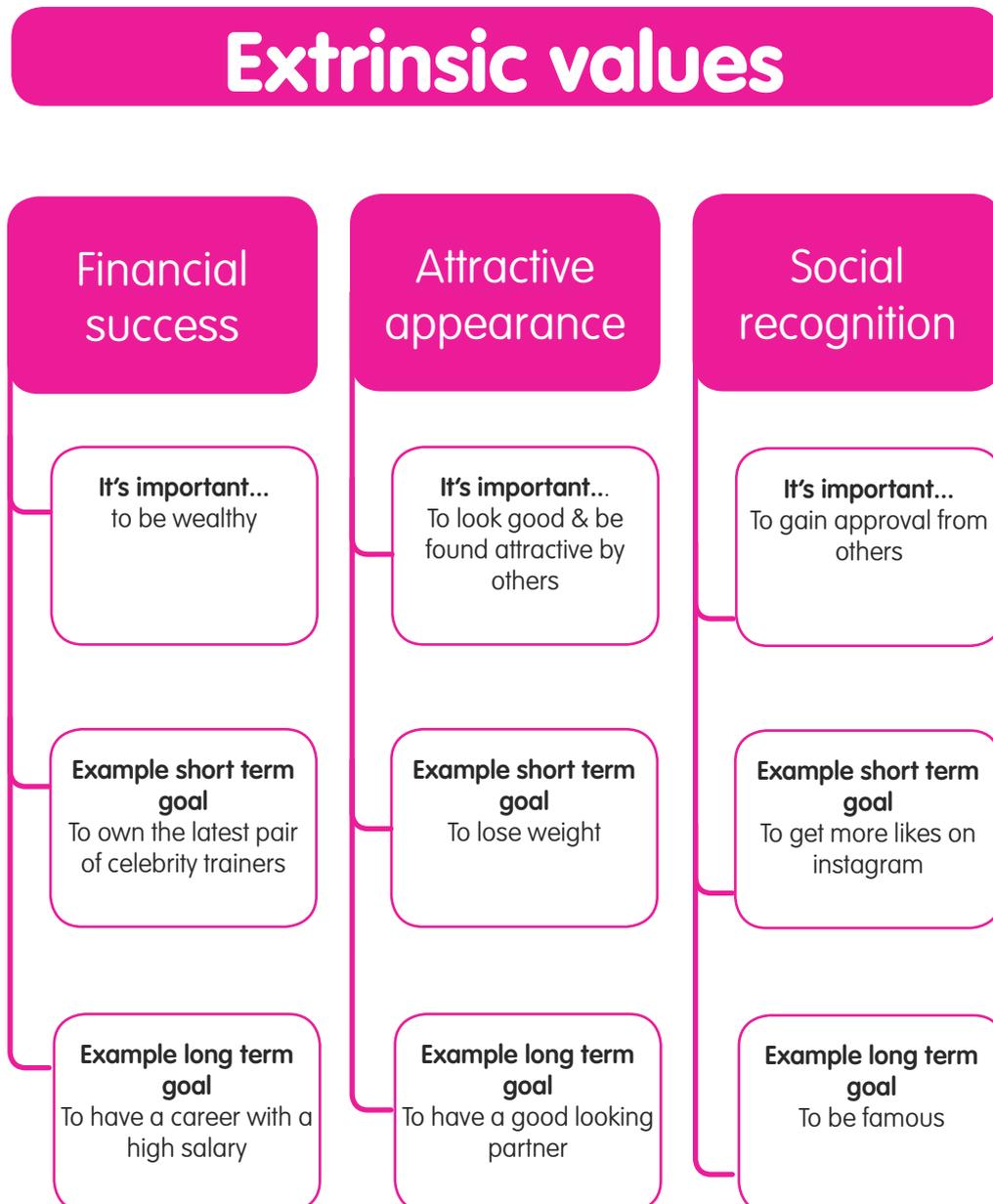
- **Extrinsic values** involve striving for financial success, an attractive appearance and social recognition. These values are mostly concerned with enhancing our own interests. They are called "extrinsic" because they rely on attaining rewards and praise from external sources and are typically a means to another end.

- **Intrinsic values** involve striving for personal growth, good relationships and contribution to our community. These values incorporate concern for the interests of others and protecting the natural environment. Intrinsic values are so called because they are inherently satisfying to pursue and more likely to satisfy our deep psychological needs, which are necessary for good wellbeing.

We all hold all these different values, but we prioritise some over others<sup>10</sup>. The values we prioritise influence both the short- and long-term goals we choose to pursue in life and the ways we spend our time, money and attention (see Figure 1 for some examples). These daily choices impact on our own wellbeing and have a wider impact on our communities and our environment.

(see Appendix A for further reading about values).

**Figure 1: Definitions of extrinsic and intrinsic goals**



# Intrinsic values



## How do our goals impact on wellbeing?

Decades of research now demonstrate that prioritising intrinsic goals is associated with higher wellbeing and prioritising extrinsic goals is associated with lower wellbeing (See Figure 1 for a summary)<sup>11</sup>. Extrinsic aspirations are not harmful to wellbeing in themselves, for example we all want financial security, to feel confident in how we look and to feel like others approve of how we behave. But we need a balance of the two sets of values, and extrinsic values become harmful when they are prioritised over and above intrinsic values.

Research has found that generational increases in psychological ill-health among young people have even been attributed to a cultural shift towards extrinsic goals such as wealth, image and status and a move away from intrinsic goals such as community, meaning in life and good relationships<sup>12</sup>.

Intrinsic goals meet our core psychological needs for autonomy (feeling we have choice and control over our lives), competence (feeling able to meet the demands of life) and relatedness (having close, healthy relationships with others)<sup>13</sup>, whereas extrinsic goals do not. Indeed, they often expose individuals to situations that make them feel worse. Even when people achieve their extrinsic goals, they may experience a temporary boost in happiness, but these boosts tend to be short-lived and offer no real nourishment to long term wellbeing. Individuals who consistently prioritise extrinsic goals are more likely to display indicators of psychological ill-being such as loneliness, eating disorders, depression and anxiety<sup>14</sup>. There are a range of explanations put forward as to why prioritising extrinsic values and goals are harmful to wellbeing:

## **Fragile self-worth**

When young people place more importance on extrinsic goals like how attractive they look, whether they have a high salary, own the right clothes, or have a large following on social media, it is often a sign that their self-esteem is contingent on others approval<sup>15</sup>. Their sense of self-worth is fragile, and even when they are successful at meeting these goals (e.g. reaching 5,000 followers), the buzz they get is short lived and their sense of self-worth quickly deflates if they do not continue to receive external validation from others.

## **Upward social comparison**

Extrinsic goals also encourage upward social comparison to others that leave young people feeling worse about themselves. It is challenging for young people not to compare their lives to music videos, celebrities or Instagram posts where perfectly curated images from brands and celebrities intermingle with posts from peers. Often these images are photoshopped or enhanced through filters and unrealistic to aspire to. Advertising explicitly uses upward social comparison to sell as it encourages us to buy more to keep up with how others are doing. This used to be called “keeping up with the Joneses” when we compared ourselves to our neighbours, but these days young people are “keeping up with the Kardashians” so have little chance of achieving these unreal expectations. Studies have found that children who spend the most money, quickest, on themselves report lower self-esteem and greater anxiety levels<sup>16</sup>.

## **Retail therapy**

Shopping is often used as a means to cope with unpleasant feelings<sup>17</sup>, but “retail therapy” does not work as it does little to address the problem that brought about the unpleasant feeling and just provides a brief distraction that quickly fades. A focus on extrinsic values has also been associated with more compulsive buying behaviours that can result in debt and financial problems<sup>18</sup>. The sticky truth is the ‘want more-feel inadequate’ cycle occurs because marketers use social anxiety as a tool to sell.

## **Crowding out our real needs**

Extrinsic goals are also thought to hinder wellbeing as the time we spend pursuing them distracts us from pursuing the types of goals that genuinely meet our psychological needs<sup>19</sup>. For example, if someone is excessively focussed on their appearance they may spend excessive amounts of time shopping online for new outfits, and the time spent doing this is a distraction away from time spent doing things that have been proven to offer genuine fulfilment, like spending time with friends and family or learning something new.

## Junk values versus healthy values

We can think of extrinsic values and goals as being like junk food; very tempting and tastes good at the time but ultimately leaves us feeling worse and gives us no real nutrition. Using this same analogy, it is fine to eat chocolate sometimes, but if we only eat sugary and fatty foods and don't eat any vegetables, we don't get the nutrition we need to be healthy.

### Values and wellbeing

	Prioritising extrinsic values and goals is associated with	Prioritising intrinsic values and goals is associated with
Our Wellbeing <sup>20</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More depression</li> <li>• Higher anxiety</li> <li>• More eating disorders</li> <li>• Risky health behaviours (e.g. smoking, alcohol use)</li> <li>• More gambling problems</li> <li>• More physical ailments</li> <li>• More loneliness</li> <li>• Lower self-esteem</li> <li>• Lower work and educational motivation</li> <li>• Higher levels of debt</li> <li>• Compulsive shopping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher life satisfaction</li> <li>• More positive emotions (e.g. feeling excited, strong or determined)</li> <li>• Better relationships</li> <li>• Higher vitality</li> <li>• Higher self-esteem</li> <li>• Less depression</li> <li>• Less anxiety</li> <li>• Better work and educational performance</li> </ul>
The Wellbeing of society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treating other in more self-serving ways</li> <li>• Lower levels of empathy</li> <li>• Fewer pro-social behaviours (such as volunteering and helping others)</li> <li>• More anti-social behaviour</li> <li>• Less care for corporate social responsibility</li> <li>• More competitive behaviour</li> <li>• More prejudicial beliefs about people outside of their "in-group"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More likely to be involved in civil society organisations and be involved in political activism</li> <li>• More care for corporate social responsibility</li> <li>• More cooperative behaviour</li> <li>• Higher empathy</li> <li>• More pro-social behaviours (such as volunteering and helping others)</li> </ul>
The Wellbeing of the Planet <sup>21</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less concern for the environment</li> <li>• Less engagement in pro-environmental behaviours</li> <li>• Higher ecological footprints</li> <li>• Consuming more</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More concern for the environment</li> <li>• More engagement in pro-environmental behaviours</li> </ul>

## Case study: The Goals for Good course

Goals for Good is a series of 4 x 1-hour workshops designed to strengthen intrinsic values and encourage young people to set and achieve goals that are good for them, good for other people and good for the planet. The course helps participants to:

- Challenge traditional notions of "success"
- Explore the Five Ways to Wellbeing and the science of what really makes us happy
- Consider the impact of their goals beyond themselves
- Increase determination and use their strengths to achieve their goals

Goals for Good was designed by Global Action Plan in collaboration with an expert panel of academics from the fields of wellbeing, values, motivation and sustainability.

Under experimental conditions the course was found to significantly increase the extent to which participants prioritised intrinsic over extrinsic goals; this change in values was maintained two months later.

*"If I'd gone out and bought a new phone you feel good for the next couple days but then it's not new anymore, whereas if you've done something good with your time and made an impact on someone, you know you've made a real difference to that person."* - Goals for Good participant

Free Goals for Good toolkits can be downloaded here: <https://www.transform-our-world.org/goals-for-good-schools-toolkit>

## How do our goals impact the planet?

Aspiring to extrinsic goals of financial success, attractive appearance and social recognition drive people to put the acquisition of material goods centre-stage in their lives. It becomes ever more important to have the latest clothes, make-up, phones and technology, then later in life the big house, the expensive car and the luxury holidays. But to continue consuming as those of us in the UK do, relies on the illusion of infinite resources. The reality is that we live on a planet with finite resources, which we are already using 70% faster than the living world can regenerate<sup>22</sup>.

We are now at a time of climate emergency. In order to stay within 1.5 degrees Celsius of global warming, a target set through 2015 Paris Agreement to avoid runaway climate breakdown, citizens of developed countries must significantly reduce personal emissions and use fewer resources<sup>23</sup>. Everything we buy has an impact on the planet, whether it's the use of scarce freshwater to grow cotton to make our clothes; the huge amount of energy needed to extract the rare metals from the ground that make our phones; or the burning of fossil fuels needed to power the transportation of these goods around the globe. According to the Global

Resources Outlook Report 2019, the extraction and production processes to make our stuff accounts for 50% of climate change impacts, 90% of water stress and 90% of biodiversity loss<sup>24</sup>. The increasingly short lifespan of trends and the speed of technological advancements means that our prized possessions quickly become either technologically or psychologically redundant, a source of embarrassment even, turning them into waste.

## Extrinsic values and ecologically responsible behaviour

Research confirms that people who prioritise extrinsic values and goals for wealth, image and status are likely to consume more and to have substantially higher ecological footprints than those who prioritise intrinsic values<sup>25</sup>. They are also more likely to hold attitudes and behaviours that contribute to environmental degradation<sup>26</sup>, for example, one study found that more extrinsically focussed UK and US adolescents were less likely to engage in environmentally-friendly behaviours such as recycling, buying second hand or riding a bicycle<sup>27</sup>.

Extrinsic goals also distract people from setting alternative goals that cultivate more active citizenship and concern for environmental stewardship and social justice<sup>28</sup>, which will be critical in securing the wellbeing of future generations and the living world<sup>29</sup>. When goals are intrinsically-led, we are more likely to attach higher importance to social and environmental challenges and to be more civically and politically engaged (through for example, volunteering, giving to charities or being a member of an organisation).

## Increasing wellbeing and reducing emissions

We cannot ignore the ecological limits of our planet and the challenges that lie ahead for the younger generation to live within them. The generation currently taking part in the climate strikes (those born between 1997 and 2012) will have a carbon allowance six times less than their baby boomer grandparents (born between 1946 to 1964)<sup>30</sup>.

We need to prioritise ways of living that will increase our wellbeing and reduce our emissions. This will inevitably require an end to the pursuit of ever more material possessions – particularly those we quickly use up and throw away – as a means to acquiring ‘the good life’. This is starting to be reflected at a national level with some countries moving away from GDP as sole indicator of national success and prioritising wellbeing instead. In May 2019, New Zealand passed a ‘wellbeing budget’, in which progress will be judged according to the health of the country’s natural resources, people, and communities, as well as its finances. Scotland and other countries are mooting similar moves.

Educational institutions have an opportunity to be at the forefront of this societal shift by talking to their students about their perceptions of success and encouraging them towards aspirations and goals that are the real ingredients of a happier, healthier and fulfilling life. Unfortunately, young people growing up in the UK today are being relentlessly sold a less healthy version of success.

*“At places like Davos people like to tell success stories. But their financial success has come with an unthinkable price tag.” - Greta Thunberg*

## An extrinsic version of success

Our values and aspirations in life are powerfully influenced by the culture we grow up in. The stories of success we see as children and adolescents shape our version of who we should aspire to be. Our version of success is influenced by our parents and peers, but also shaped by media we are exposed to. Research demonstrates that since the 1970's people's goals have become increasingly extrinsically-motivated<sup>31</sup>.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the full breadth of ways that today's culture promotes extrinsic goals, but we will briefly focus on one of the key drivers of this culture: advertising.

### Advertising

*"It (advertising) kind of leaves this idea that if you have all these products, you're going to be more successful and it's going to be easier for you."* (Lucy, aged 14)

*"It's a huge pressure for people my age to have to afford new clothes, shoes cosmetics and it really affects the mentally, because they think "I won't be popular if I don't have this".* (Sam, aged 13)

Advertising portrays a route to happiness and success paved by what you earn, what you own and how you look. As previously discussed, these goals are unhealthy for our wellbeing and for the health of the planet. Young people are particularly susceptible to messages tying consumer goods to popularity, self-worth and love, and are strongly motivated to fit in with their peers.

Advertisers are using increasingly targeted and sophisticated techniques to make young people feel like they need certain things to fit in better and to feel better. Today, aided by their mobile devices, advertising targets young people everywhere, at all times. The increased exposure to advertising on social media and the ever-presence of smartphones means young people are exposed to messages promoting extrinsic values from the time they wake up, to the time they go to bed. Advertising also uses intrinsic values as a tool to sell. That buying their products will improve our relationships, give us a sense of adventure, a feeling of belonging. But of course, the products do not deliver in meeting our intrinsic needs.

This is not a blanket criticism of social media. Social media platforms can be a positive force in promoting healthy values and goals, as exemplified by the youth climate strike movement, which in September 2019 spawned more than 6,100 demonstrations in over 185 countries, making it the biggest climate protest in history. This could never have grown so quickly without the connecting power of social media. But we do wish to highlight the pressures young people are under from excessive advertising on this new media as advertising can have a powerful impact on cultural attitudes and social norms beyond the particular product they are selling. They give messages about what we should value and what is important in life. These messages are usually extrinsically focused: how you look, what you own and what other people think of you is important.

*"Young people are growing up with a warped sense of what is normal because so much of what they see on social media is false."* - Damian Hinds, Former Education Secretary<sup>32</sup>.

## The shiny gloss of extrinsic values

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to tackle the might of the advertising industry, it is important for institutions to recognise the relentless pressure that young people are under to prioritise extrinsic values and goals. These values are packaged and sold in endless shiny, sophisticated adverts and delivered by cutting-edge media, making it almost impossible for young people (or indeed any of us) to resist them. The impacts of advertising saturation are not felt equally: teens from low-income families are most exposed to advertising and are also disproportionately affected by poor mental health<sup>33</sup>.

However, strongly critiquing extrinsic values and goals may prove counter-productive, as some young people could feel their values and goals are being threatened and so cling to them even more<sup>34</sup>. It can therefore be more useful to hold open discussions around values and actively encourage intrinsic values and goals. Values research demonstrates that the strengthening of intrinsic values is associated with the weakening of extrinsic values<sup>35</sup> so this is a viable strategy to reduce the importance of unhealthy values and goals. It can of course be useful to explore the facts around the harmful impact of extrinsic values and goals to wellbeing and the planet, but being careful to avoid strong moral judgements, as this may cause some to disengage.

## The role of institutions

The school experience is rarely value-free or values neutral. Educators have a responsibility to be mindful of the values that are being activated and reinforced, whether through the formal and non-formal curricula – especially given what we know about the relationship between values and wellbeing. The values that are held to be important by the institutions where young people spend much of their time play a very important role in shaping the development of the values they will prioritise throughout their lives<sup>36</sup>. They will influence what the young person will see as “normal”, “acceptable” and “desirable” behaviours. Importantly, it is not just what the institution says they hold to be important, but what they are perceived to hold important that has an influential role. For example, if an institution says that kindness to others is important, but only rewards academic achievement, then students are likely to perceive that kindness is not really what is valued by the institution. Students will be more influenced by what they are shown to be important, than what they are told. Institutions can embrace this influence by asking themselves what values they want to instil and how these values are projected through the behaviours that are recognised, rewarded and measured.

## Normalising intrinsic values and goals

Institutions have an important role in normalising intrinsic values and goals and giving young people a platform to express these values. Individuals are less likely to express their concern for their communities or for nature if they think doing so will make them seem weird or peculiar in some way. Teenagers are especially sensitive to social norms and will not want to draw attention to themselves as different to others. It is therefore especially important to help young people see other young people expressing intrinsic values and pursuing intrinsic goals.

## Influencing the values of wider society

Institutions have also been found to have an important role in the general public's perceptions of what their fellow citizens value. Research by the Common Cause Foundation<sup>37</sup> has found that most people in the UK tend to believe that institutions (including schools, universities and workplaces) encourage values that prioritise wealth, image and ambition more than intrinsic values. They also found that the more strongly people believed this to be true, the more likely they were to believe that their fellow citizens also held more extrinsic values. This further highlights the important role that these institutions play, not just in promoting

intrinsic values to the young people within them, but also their role in shaping public perceptions. The good news is that institutions can play a key role in building public engagement on environmental and social challenges by demonstrating that they care about these issues.

## Want to start exploring values in your school?

### Here are some suggested domains to consider:

- Explore values in PSHE lessons
- Provide visible opportunities for students to demonstrate their intrinsic values
- Find opportunities to explore values throughout the National Curriculum, e.g. discussing the values being displayed by characters in history or literature.
- Use Citizenship lessons to help students consider how they can express their values through their actions in their communities.
- Consider whole school training to help staff and students to understand and articulate their values.

## Resources

- Goals for Good – <https://www.transform-our-world.org/goals-for-good-schools-toolkit>
- Transform Our World - Transform Our World is a new online hub full of free, practical resources for teachers. It empowers young people to tackle the root causes of the climate breakdown and biodiversity loss. Explore the hub at: <https://www.transform-our-world.org>

## Work with us

We want to join with teachers and organisations in the environment and education sectors to drive discussion about the role of values in sustainable education. Please get in touch with [transformourworld@globalactionplan.org.uk](mailto:transformourworld@globalactionplan.org.uk) if you're interested in taking part.

# Further information on values

## Different models of values

There are two main models of values in the academic literature which we have drawn from this report. These models use different terms to describe similar distinctions between the types of values we intend to have.

### 1. Intrinsic versus extrinsic values and goals

Professor Tim Kasser has been researching values and goals for over two decades and distinguishes two types of values and goals that we strive for in life:

- a. Intrinsic values and goals:** for self-acceptance, affiliation, and community feeling.
- b. Extrinsic values and goals:** for attractive appearance, social recognition and financial success.

### 2. Schwartz's model of Basic Human Values

Shakim Schwartz (1992) has conducted research into human values in over 70 countries and described two opposing types of values: self-enhancement values vs self-transcendent values.

**a. Self-transcendent values** demonstrate concern for the welfare and interests of others and include:

- *Benevolence*: preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact (the 'in-group').
- *Universalism*: understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of *all* people and for nature.

**b. Self-enhancement values** demonstrate concern for one's own interests and relative success and dominance over others. These include:

- *Power*: social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources.
- *Achievement*: personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards.

To keep things simple, we will combine these terms to simply talk about "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" values or goals.

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