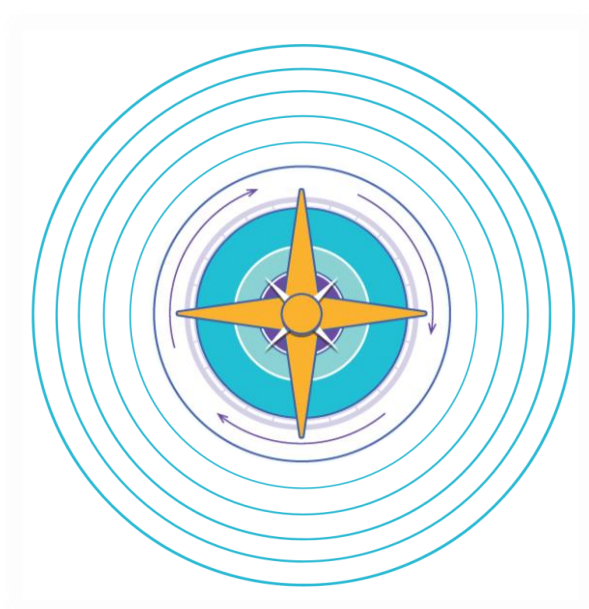


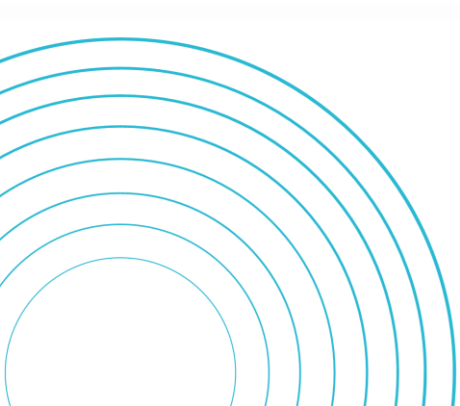
OECD Learning Compass 2030 Transformative Competencies



Taking responsibility

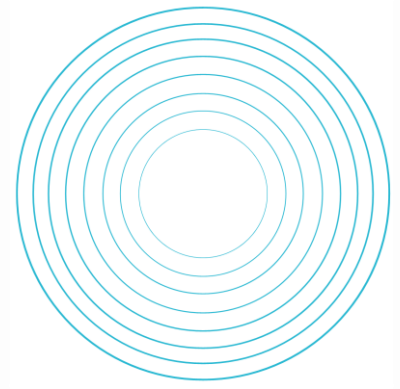
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OECD Learning Compass 2030

Transformative Competencies: Taking Responsibility



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As it is pointed out in the [OECD Learning Compass 2030](#), “taking responsibility” is one of crucial competencies students need to develop in order to be prepared for unforeseen future of 2030. “Taking responsibility” requires that students consider their role in shaping the world’s future, which demands that they consider the future consequences of their actions and decisions. And as students do this more regularly, it will strengthen their sense of self-efficacy and their general sense of well-being.

I define “responsibility” as exercising control over one’s behavior, and interacting with others in ways that demonstrate healthy independence, planning ahead, and impulse control. “Taking responsibility” depends on having a strong sense of self-regulation. And this requires the maturation of brain systems that are especially likely to grow and change in adolescence.

Two specific aspects of brain development are especially important in adolescence. First, brain regions and systems that regulate self-control and advanced thinking abilities, such as logical reasoning, planning ahead, and weighing risk and reward, become more efficient, as “clutter” that is due to the overproduction of connections between brain cells is reduced, a process called “synaptic pruning.” This elimination of unnecessary brain circuitry is accompanied by the continued growth of white matter, which creates sheathes around existing neuronal pathways, enabling the speedier flow of information from one brain region to another.

Second, connections between these cognitive control regions and other parts of the brain mature, allowing more effective communication between brain systems that support self-regulation and those that are easily aroused by emotional stimuli, reward, and threat. These stronger connections enable the developing adolescent to exercise control over his or her feelings, thoughts, and behavior. Together with improvements in advanced thinking abilities, these gains in self-regulation allow teenagers to act more independently and responsibly.

This is why it is crucial that schools and other youth-serving institutions help facilitate the development of self-regulation. The more students are given opportunities to take responsibility for their actions and decisions, the more likely the competence is to develop. Self-regulation is like a muscle – the more often it is used, the stronger it gets.

Doing this requires that the adults in charge of young people’s lives – parents, teachers, coaches and so on – find ways of providing chances for youth to exercise independence and practice self-control. I think there are two main challenges. The first is that adults are understandably nervous about relinquishing control over young people. The second is that if they do give up some control, adults fear that adolescents will make mistakes. The key is helping adults understand that the only way to help promote “responsibility” is to grant it gradually and allow students themselves learn how to cope with challenge, overcome adversity and respond to their mistakes when they make them.

¹ [Laurence Steinberg](#), Ph.D., the Distinguished University Professor and Laura H. Carnell Professor of Psychology at Temple University, is one of the world’s leading experts on adolescence. He is the author or co-author of more than 400 articles and essays on development during the teenage years, and the author, co-author, or editor of 17 books, including *Beyond the Classroom* and *Adolescence*, the leading college textbook on the subject. His latest book is *Age of Opportunity: Lessons From the New Science of Adolescence*. His research has focused on a range of topics, including adolescent brain and psychological development, risk-taking and decision-making, family and peer relationships, and school achievement. He has also written for *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*, and is a frequent guest on NPR. He is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association, the Association for Psychological Science, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.