

‘Who am I?’ – Identity and Guidance

‘Who am I?’ and ‘What am I going to be?’ are questions most of us ask ourselves from time to time. Such reflections are an essential part of human growth and development. They are also related to human identity, self-understanding and perceiving where we come from and where we are going. The perceptions we have of ourselves affect how we think, behave and act throughout our lives. Strong self-knowledge and the identity experience built on it promote our overall well-being and make it easier for us to succeed in relationships we regard as important.

Our identity is not something carved in stone or something that lasts forever. Instead, it is constantly changing and renewable. It develops and grows when we interact with other people. Identity can be seen as a process continuing throughout life, where our self-knowledge is deepened and diversified as we accumulate more life experiences. The uncertainty that you may have experienced about yourself as a young person will pass and, over the years, you will develop an internal understanding of who you are and what matters to you. A person’s own world view and the related values, ideals, beliefs and attitudes often become clearer and crystallised only at a later age.

Identity consists of the personal and social aspects of a person. What is personal about us makes us unique and distinguishes us from other people. The social aspect of identity is reflected in the groups we belong to, such as family, school friends, colleagues at work, hobbies, religion, politics, ethnicity, native language, citizenship, age, and gender. We have stronger connections to some groups and looser to the others, and some of our group identifications overlap or are interlocked. All of them, individually and together, define us and tell something essential about us to other people.

The groups we belong to and identify with affect how we see and experience ourselves. However, it may sometimes be necessary to critically examine and assess the impact of a particular group on us and our identity and decipher whether it is good or harmful. Belonging to a group often involves social pressure and a desire to be accepted by others, particularly at a young age. In the worst-case scenario, this can mean participating in groups whose attitudes or behaviour do not support the development of a positive self-image and identity. It is therefore good to have the courage to question what are the groups or different characteristics through which we define ourselves at any given time. An internal dialogue with yourself is a good way to structure your own identity and consider how it can be developed throughout life.

Self-examination is not always easy or comfortable, but at best, it is quite rewarding. The expectations and hopes we have for ourselves do not always materialise, which may lead to frustration and disappointment. This experience may bring things to a momentary standstill which, at worst, paralyses us and prevents us from seeing all the good in ourselves. 'What kind of person do I want to be?' is a question most of us want to find an answer to.

Guidance and counselling can support the overall well-being of an individual and create balance in the relationship they have with themselves and the environment. Guidance can help individuals see themselves in a new and more objective light and gain insights into themselves, their abilities and their interests. Guidance can provide help and support for verbalising your own identity and matters that are important to you, and for linking them to your education and career choices. In addition, discussions with a guidance counsellor or teacher can clarify your own thinking and offer new perspectives for it. Moreover, guidance often increases people's understanding of their own personality and potential.

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