

SIX STAGES OF FUTURE FORECASTING

- 1. Expect change:** This is about situating ourselves in change. While it's easy to think things will stay as they are today, they won't. The present, however you define it, is always a temporary condition.¹⁴ This practice asks us to think about inbound changes—what's happening to us—and outbound changes—what we are doing to change things. We can teach kids to *signal scan*, which is the practice of looking around for signals of change—early indicators that things are shifting, including new patterns and trends. Over time, this practice helps kids embrace uncertainty and become more aware and open-minded.
- 2. Question assumptions:** This is thinking through changes that are happening and which ones might persist and increase. It's shifting language from "this can't happen" to "what if this were possible?" or "What if there could be a different way?" We can work with kids on their "what if" thinking based on the signals of change they uncovered in the first stage. Questioning assumptions builds an imaginative space where young people can safely explore and consider how to shape the future, building their self-efficacy and sense of power over it. During this stage, young people explore the space between now and the future, which helps them discover ways to act and respond.
- 3. Play with alternative futures:** This is examining what the future might look like, by studying and contemplating the impacts of different assumptions. It's understanding our baseline assumptions and working through possible alternatives if things change. With children, we can think through scenarios about one aspect of the future (e.g., education, environment, health) if the current state continues or if one or more things change. They can act out these scenarios creatively, through a play, song, in writing, or art.
- 4. Create multiple scenarios:** In this stage, we step back and wonder what all the possible futures could be, because it is unlikely the future we imagine will be the one we get. The purpose of this stage is to explore and examine a range of possibilities. Ask kids to answer these questions for each possible future: How would I succeed in this one? What skills and supports would I need? This stage builds young people's belief that they can live in uncertainty and that there are strengths and strategies they have that will work across them all.
- 5. Envision how to endure and thrive:** This is naming personal strengths and strategies that will last. This helps kids understand and give language to their timeless needs and the things about their lives that will be true no matter what happens, and it provides an emotional anchor for them to tap into when they feel frightened by a change or challenge. Once those timeless values and needs are identified, you can help young people work to strengthen them and know how to access them when they're needed.
- 6. Make sense of what these futures mean for today:** This final stage is about empowering young people as storytellers and creators. This is where we make sense of the world and find ways to monitor, manage, and act in the present. You can have kids try the "three horizons method," which is when a forecaster answers these three questions: What are we doing now (near-term future)? What is our ideal future (long-term future)? How do we get there (mid-term future)? This is an exploration of the similarities and differences between the present and future, and what transitional steps are needed to get from the near term to long term. Think of this as a forecasting GPS, showing various routes you can take and how much time you might spend on various parts of the journey.