

VIP Value In Parenting

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Building Assets In Youth

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Being a parent or caregiver can be very hard work - no surprise there, right? Most parents and caregivers have things they love about their role, as well as problems with their children that have to be addressed. What might be surprising, though, is that *one of the best ways to deal with problems is to focus on building the positives rather than concentrate on the negatives.*

Research shows that an effective approach to raising healthy, competent kids is to concentrate on building Developmental Assets. These assets form the foundation young people need to make healthy choices and to succeed in life. The more assets your children have, the stronger this foundation will be.

There are probably lots of asset-building things you already do for your children - even if you don't call them that. Helping to provide the best environment for asset development is one of the ways adults can help all young people to become caring, productive citizens.

Asset-Building and Youth Development

Researchers at Search InstituteSM have found that Developmental Assets, which are the building blocks of healthy development, make a difference.

Easy Ways To Build Assets

- ◆ **Post the list of 40 Developmental Assets on your refrigerator door. Each day, do at least one asset-building thing for each family member.**
- ◆ **Eat at least one meal together as a family every day.**
- ◆ **Negotiate family rules and consequences for breaking rules.**
- ◆ **Learn as much as you can about what your children need at their current ages.**
- ◆ **Recognize that children need more than just financial support. They also need emotional and intellectual support. Balance family time with other priorities like work, recreation, and hobbies.**
- ◆ **Remember that you are not alone. Other asset builders in your children's lives include coaches, child-care providers, teachers, club leaders, and neighbors. Work with these people to give young people consistent messages about expectations, boundaries and values.**

Young people with more of these Developmental Assets are:

1. More likely to make choices we value (which researchers call thriving indicators);
2. Less likely to get into trouble (which researchers call risky behaviors); and
3. More likely to bounce back when life gets hard (which researchers call resiliency).

What Are Developmental Assets?

Developmental Assets can be defined as: positive factors in young people, families, communities, schools, and other settings that are important in promoting young people's healthy development. Search Institute researchers have identified 40 Developmental Assets that make a difference in the lives of young people. Unfortunately, too many young people report not having enough of these assets.

Benefits of Asset-Building

Becoming familiar with the concept of Asset-Building can serve three functions for you and your family.

- ◆ It provides validation to steps you're already taking to help your children grow into healthy and productive adults!
- ◆ It gives you some guidance about ways to enrich the lives of your children and family!
- ◆ It provides a common language for you to use with other adults, including teachers, coaches,

(Continued on next page)

spiritual leaders, and camp counselors when talking about your children.

Because children don't come with directions, tools like the 40 Developmental Assets can be very useful in helping parents and caregivers to learn:

- ◆ The common needs of children at different stages of development;
- ◆ What adults can do to assist children in meeting their needs; and
- ◆ What resources exist in your home, school and community to help children meet their needs.

For many adults who live and/or work with young children, the 40 Developmental Assets have become a source of ideas and inspiration in the face of frustration and even despair.

Breaking it Down

The 40 Developmental Assets are grouped in two categories - External and Internal. These two categories are further broken down into eight areas, each describing particular needs for healthy development. As parents and caregivers, we know our children best! Therefore, we can help identify which areas our children have strength in and which need some work. Once we have identified which areas are weak, we can work in the home, at school, and through the community to help develop and make use of the needed systems to build these assets. (For example, in the area of External Support, we can help our child choose a sport or activity where they will be exposed to other safe and caring adults.)

Asset-Building - for ALL Parents and Caregivers

Regardless of your family make-up, all children will benefit from an increase in external and internal assets. Making this a priority in your home NOW will prevent many potential problems from arising LATER.

All parents and caregivers, including those who are working, single, separated or divorced, financially successful or financially strapped, should be able to find the time and resources to build assets for and with their children. Whether working in or out of the home, you face daily challenges in juggling the different responsibilities of your life. Why not use these challenges as unique opportunities for building assets?

Take care of yourself: If you're always exhausted, overwhelmed, and stressed, you'll find it difficult to provide the kind of nurturing and stable environment helpful for your child's physical, social and emotional development. Children model their behavior after yours - if you don't take care of yourself, how will they learn to do so once they are adults?

EXTERNAL ASSETS

The first four asset categories focus on **external structures, relationships, and activities** that create a positive environment for young people:

SUPPORT

Young people need to be surrounded by people who love, care for, appreciate, and accept them.

EMPOWERMENT

Young people need to feel valued and valuable. This happens when youth feel safe and respected.



BOUNDARIES & EXPECTATIONS

Young people need clear rules, consistent consequences for breaking rules, and encouragement to do their best.



CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME

Young people need opportunities-outside of school-to learn and develop new skills and interests with other youth and adults.



INTERNAL ASSETS

The next four categories reflect **internal values, skills, and beliefs** that young people also need to fully engage with and function in the world around them:

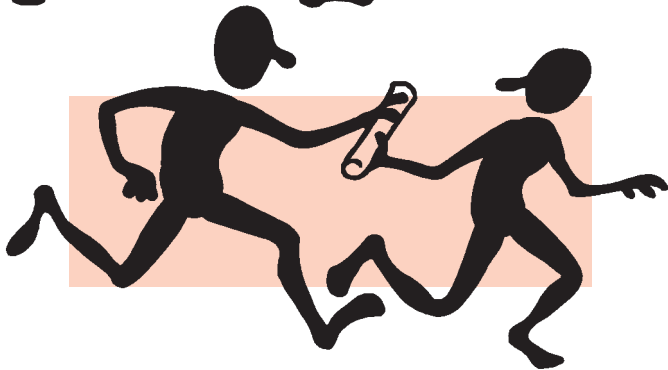
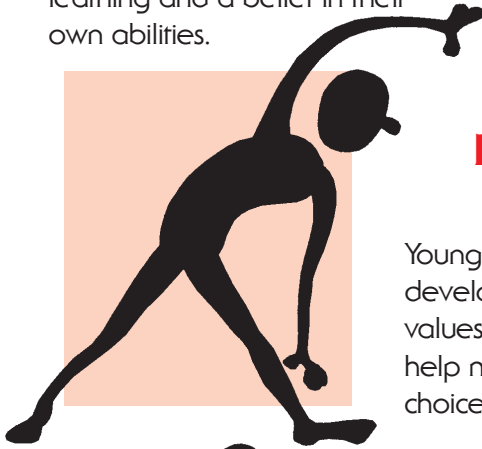
COMMITMENT TO LEARNING

Young people need a sense of the lasting importance of learning and a belief in their own abilities.



POSITIVE VALUES

Young people need to develop strong guiding values or principles to help make healthy life choices.



SOCIAL COMPETENCIES

Young people need the skills to interact effectively with others, to make difficult decisions, and to cope with new situations.

POSITIVE IDENTITY

Young people need to believe in their own self-worth and to feel that they have control over the things that happen to them.



Research finds that women, in particular, may not take time out for themselves because they are busy doing for everyone else around them. If you find that this is happening in your life, why not tell family members that you will be taking a small amount of time for yourself every day or every other day. Begin with a realistic amount of personal time - you can read a chapter in a book or walk around the neighborhood. This will both help to relieve your stress and model healthy behaviors!

Enlist everyone in the family to do their part with chores: Children need to know that they are needed by their family, and contributing with simple chores helps every family to run more smoothly. Some families create a chore time when everyone does chores at the same time. Others divide (and rotate) chores between family members. It is important to recognize that all children (by the age of two) can contribute meaningfully, but that they should not necessarily be expected to complete all chores the way an adult would!

You can: encourage your two year old to put the napkins on the table before dinner; ask your four year old to pick up their toys and place them on their shelves before you vacuum; have your six year old help decide on the menu for Sunday brunch; give your eight year old a rake to help with the autumn leaves; find your ten year old a special book to share with his/her siblings.

Develop healthy and meaningful relationships within and outside the home: All children want adult attention almost all of the time (at least until they are teenagers!) Spend undivided time with each child in your family - reading, having fun tossing a ball to each other, looking at clouds, listening to what's on their mind and in their heart...

Children are like sponges, and they will soak up the environment around them. What young children need more than anything is the presence of caring and trusted adults. The "stuff" we give them is far less important, so spend your time *with* them rather than spending your money *on* them!

Find support for yourself: All people, young and old, thrive on companionship and support. Don't think that you need to parent alone, regardless of your family situation or the needs of your children. When you take advantage of others knowledge and views, you not only learn new ways of approaching old problems, but you also affirm that you are not the only parent who has such problems!

For example, your child might be a biter. Find out from your child's teacher, your friend, a neighbor or a local educator whether it is common for children of this age to bite? Compare notes to come up with some strategies that you can test out! When you understand

the needs of children at different ages (biting is a way that some young children express their frustration before they have developed a suitable vocabulary), you are less likely to be angry at them for their behavior. Saying to this child: "We use words when we are angry; we use our teeth to chew our food" is one way of building the external assets of clear boundaries and expectations.

Asset-Building with Child Care Providers, Youth Workers and Other Family Members

There is strength in community. Parents, grandparents and child care/youth serving programs need to be on the same page. Children need to experience consistency to feel secure in their world. While others who provide care for your children might not use the term developmental assets, they should be aware of the basic needs of young children and be able to create a suitable environment that will assist them to develop these assets.

When looking for a child care or respite program a parent must consider:

- ◆ Do I agree with their attitudes and policies?
- ◆ Is this a safe and healthy place for me to leave my child?
- ◆ How are we greeted each day?
- ◆ Is the provider/relative/youth worker calm, patient, warm, caring, and attentive?
- ◆ Does the provider/relative/youth worker spend time interacting with my child?
- ◆ Is my child acknowledged for doing the "right" thing?
- ◆ Is there a consistent schedule?
- ◆ Is my child learning things that are developmentally appropriate to his/her age and developmental level?
- ◆ Is my child given opportunities to learn new things through hands-on and through using their senses?

Local Contacts:

For more information, and to receive print resources or attend workshops related to child development, child care, parenting, grandparenting, and the 40 Developmental Assets, please contact any of the following resources.

Orange County Youth Bureau

Phone: 845-291-2399 Email: youthbur@co.orange.ny.us
Web: www.orangecountygov.com

Check out their Youth & Family Services Directory for a listing of a variety of youth programs as well as youth & family services available throughout the county. Youth ages 13-18yr can find info about how to join the Orange County Youth Leadership & Service Council.

Child Care Council of Orange County, Inc.

Phone: 1-800-827-1751 Email: info@childcarecounciloc.org
Web: www.childcarecounciloc.org

Parents can go online to find valuable information about how to be referred to quality child care for all children regardless of income level or cultural background. Child Care Providers can go online to find out how to open a center, as well as obtain information about trainings and available grants.

Cornell Cooperative Extension Orange County

Phone: 845-344-1234 Web: www.cce.cornell.edu/orange

Offers information about parenting programs and workshops countywide and provides leadership for the Orange County Parenting Coalition. Workshops for parents of children of all ages, programs for relative caregivers, professional trainings, parenting newsletters and resource and referral are available year round.

Other Resources:

Search Institute

Phone: 1-800-888-7828 Web: www.search-institute.org

Go online for free downloads of age appropriate lists of the Assets. The catalog offers a variety of practical ways to build assets in your home, school, community, youth programs/centers - anywhere that youth are! For a copy of the lists with the definitions, go to www.search-institute.org/assets.

Two Legs to Stand On-Eight to Grow...

This book is a "gift of essentials" for parents and caregivers to learn about the assets along with their children. The fun, interactive, and educational activities can have a lasting impact on a preschooler's or early elementary student's social skill development.

Playful Reading: Positive, Fun Ways to Build the Bond between Preschoolers, Books, and You

By Carolyn Munson-Benson

Want to boost a child's love of reading while making your time together more fun and meaningful? Playful Reading takes readers on a joyful romp through asset-rich children's picture books.

Life Freaks Me Out And Then I Deal with It (reassuring secrets from a former teenager)

By K. L. Hong

Turbulent. Exhilarating. Confusing. Real. These words describe what Life Freaks Me Out is all about—living, being, and growing up as a teen.

Parenting at the Speed of Teens Positive Tips on Everyday Issues

The book is written around common parent issues, questions, and frustrations. Parents will relate to the real-life dilemmas addressed in chapters on Home and Family, School, Friends and Peers, Work, Image, and Special Issues. Parents will find comfort and reassurance in the assets-based parenting perspective and advice.

Stay Close 40 Clever Ways to Connect with Kids When You're Apart

By Tenessa Gemelke

How can you make sure a young person grows up happy and healthy even when you're not physically there?

Remember, the 40 Developmental Assets will only work to strengthen your children and your family if you apply them to your daily life. Why not start today?

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For more information on parenting education and/or the Orange County Parenting Coalition Action Team, contact Cornell Cooperative Extension at 845 - 344 - 1234.

www.cce.cornell.edu/orange

Cornell Cooperative Extension provides equal program and employment opportunities.



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