

Psych Savvy

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT

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Developing Assets: A Framework for Success

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Too few young people grow up experiencing key ingredients for healthy development, including support from adults, relationships that cross generations, and/or hear consistent messages about boundaries and values. Much of the responsibility and capacity for the healthy development of youth is in the hands of the general public, America's people.

The Assets Model for understanding the developmental needs of children and adolescents was created by the Search Institute of Minneapolis. Forty building blocks, or developmental assets, are needed for the growth of healthy, responsible, and caring youths. These assets were identified by research on more than 100,000 youth in grades 6-12. The need for these assets is documented for all youth, regardless of age, gender, geographical region, town size, or race/ethnicity.

There are eight primary areas under which developmental assets fall: Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Constructive Use of Time, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Skills, and Positive Identity. Assets are cumulative: the more the better. The more assets young people experience, the more likely they will experience success. The fewer assets, the more likely they are to engage in dangerous behaviors, such as alcohol/drug use, antisocial behavior, violence, and others.

Key Themes in Asset Building:

- ◆ Assets are nurtured in all young people.
- ◆ Relationships are key.
- ◆ Everyone contributes to the vision.
- ◆ Asset building never stops.
- ◆ The community is filled with consistent messages.
- ◆ Duplication and repetition are valued.

How to Implement? NOT by starting new programs. The answer lies with all people within a community *reclaiming* responsibility for raising young people, and shifting focus from problem-based to a positive vision.

Ultimately, every institution and organization in a community contributes to creating a healthy community-either through its specific mission or through its sense of community responsibility. How? First, they can become involved in supporting community-wide efforts on behalf of youth.

Second, they can focus on how they support families and their employees to be involved in asset building for youth at home and in the community.

Eight Principles for Getting Started:

- Encourage people to get involved.
- Be positive; your efforts count.
- Build on quality information.
- Take time to motivate and educate.
- Celebrate commitments and successes.
- Communicate with other communities and share ideas.
- Don't spend time creating new programs
- Get good ideas from the internet and Assets booklet

Assets offer a framework for parenting that is based on priorities and perspectives rather than “stuff you should do”. Key benefits from this approach include:

- A focus for parenting: A parent’s primary role lies in raising caring, competent, and responsible young people.
- Affirmation and motivation: Assets remind parents that what they do makes a huge difference, and encourages parents to stay actively involved throughout childhood and adolescence.
- A positive perspective
- Partners in parenting: The Assets approach provides families with a supportive, caring network of partners, similar to the informal community that previous generations of parents depended on for support and guidance.

Ways for individuals to get started within their community:

- View youth and youth issues by identifying strengths you can help build or opportunities you can offer.
- Show young people you care through smiles and simple gestures of kindness; these actions help break down suspicions and build trust.
- Build sustained relationships with youth.
- Rebuild connections and commitments in your neighborhood; get to know your neighbors and encourage people to watch out for kids.
- Get involved in youth-serving programs.
- Influence organizations and networks. For example, share your perspectives with friends, and encourage a corporation or organization to contribute to asset building.
- Advocate on the behalf of youth. Attend a neighborhood meeting to encourage a proactive approach to addressing the needs of young people. Speak out about concerns about young people. Meet or write to public officials to support legislation that can contribute to asset building.

Resources:

The Search Institute: Healthy Communities- Healthy Youth
www.search-institute.org/archives/hchy

Helping Kids Succeed – Alaskan Style

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