

Article #1

In an effort to learn more about the developmental strengths present or lacking in our school aged children, Pulaski Community Partners Coalition gathered data from 4th and 5th grade students across the county. The data, collected in the spring of 2005, relates to the Developmental Assets framework of healthy youth development. Developmental Assets are the positive experiences, opportunities, and personal qualities that all children and adolescents need to grow up responsible, successful, and caring. There are eight categories of assets: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. Over the course of the next few weeks we will be reporting the findings of the data and offering suggestions for building an asset rich community for all of our children. The first asset category is support.

You can support young people with your love, care, and attention.

Wondering how you can make a difference in the life of a child? Many studies over the past two decades have confirmed that caring, supportive relationships with adults are critical for raising healthy, resilient adolescents, report the scientists at Search Institute, a nonprofit research organization in Minneapolis.

And one of the main components in of good adult-youth relationships is support. But just what does support mean? It means freely giving love, affirmation, and acceptance; surrounding children and youth with caring families, guardians, friends, teachers, neighbors, and other adults; and helping young people know that they belong, that they are not alone, and that they are both loved and lovable.

Here are four things to remember as you take steps to support young people.

- **Relationships are key.** Building bonds with young people takes action: actively being patient, listening, and giving of yourself.
- **Different people and situations call for different kinds of support.** Resolve to comfort young people, defend them, encourage them, help them, be fair, advise them, give them your attention, have high expectations, or simply be there.

- **Support doesn't have to be big or loud or visible to be important.** Sometimes it's as small as making a phone call, introducing yourself, returning a smile, noticing when they are sad or disappointed, or remembering to ask about a child's pet rabbit. If you're not sure how to be supportive, ask the young people themselves.
- **Adults thrive when they are supported, too.** You can model support for young people by being supportive toward other adults—praising them, taking time for them, being interested in them, working to understand them. Pay attention to when you need support, too. You can improve your support skills by nurturing your own relationships, seeking counseling when you need guidance, joining a support group, or attending a workshop on communication or parenting skills.

In upcoming articles we will be summarizing the first six Developmental Assets that are included in the category of support. We will report our local data related to individual assets and offer easy, practical ideas for building the featured asset.

From *Get the Word Out: Communication Tools and Ideas for Asset Builders Everywhere*.

Copyright © 2003 Search Institute, 800-888-7828, www.search-institute.org. To learn more about our local initiative contact: Pulaski Community Partners Coalition, www.aboutpcpc.org, 980-3228.

