

Article #20

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 important in the lives of all young people, regardless of gender, race, age, or size of community. 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. In the next four articles we will explore the asset category *constructive use of time*.

You can help young people find activities that make good use of their time.

If you talk with young people about using their time constructively, you'll probably hear one of two common refrains. One is, "So much to do, so little time." That sigh is most likely to come from a young person with lots of opportunities—like teams, clubs, youth centers, and music lessons—to choose from.

The other is, "Oh, there's nothing to do!" That groan is most likely to come from a young person who hasn't yet discovered, or for some reason can't access, the activities he or she would really enjoy.

The key is to help young people strike a balance between unstructured activities and structured ones. Young people's activity options may range from being at home (alone or with family or friends, studying, doing chores, or relaxing) to participating in school-sponsored activities (such as teams or clubs), hanging out in public places or at friends' homes, or attending youth groups or centers, music lessons, or religious services.

At their best, activities for young people involve learning, developing new skills, using their creativity, being with other caring youth and adults, and interacting with their families and friends in positive ways.

Here are some keys to constructive use of time:

- **Balance is essential.** Too much involvement can lead to stress, anxiety, and too little personal time. Too little involvement can be a sign of depression, isolation, or some other unhealthy situation.
- **Young people need opportunities to play and be creative.** Studies show that time spent in play and games declines by more than half as children mature into adolescence. Involvement in music, arts, and sports can encourage youth to tap into their playful, spontaneous energy.
- **Different young people need different things.** For an extroverted member of the debate team, quiet time in nature might seem intimidating or scary at first. For a shy person not involved in any school clubs or activities, a one-on-one apprenticeship in glassblowing or car repair might be just the ticket to a new interest.
- **Adolescents want and need to “try on” different ways of being.** A young person who struggles and feels out of place in school may excel and be a leader in a less traditional setting, thus building a sense of competence and confidence not experienced anywhere else.

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

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