

## Article #31

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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 six articles we will explore the asset category *positive values*.

*You can instill positive values to guide young people.*

Values are the foundation for the choices we make and the way we think. Exploring and developing values is especially critical for adolescents as they develop personal identity.

In the developmental assets framework, positive values means:

- **Caring about others**, including being committed to *equality* and *social justice*;
- Having high standards for **personal character**, such as being *honest*, having *integrity*, and taking *responsibility*; and
- Believing in **protecting your own well-being** by *refraining from sexual activity and alcohol or other drug use*.

Young people's values grow out of discovering what is important to them and what matters to people they care about. As part of this process, young people will "try on" different values to see if they fit and are comfortable. You can't choose young people's values, but you can help shape their values by talking about them, living yours, and explaining their importance in your life.

Here are some points to keep in mind as you strive to guide and positively influence the young people in your family, school, workplace, and neighborhood:

- **Values should inspire, not just prohibit.** Too often, the values we seek to instill in young people focus only on staying away from negative behaviors. This emphasis on what *not to do* gives little guidance for the majority of life choices. Young people also need to develop values such as responsibility and caring that guide their day-to-day actions and interactions in positive ways.
- **Values don't always lead to actions.** At times young people are torn between a value they hold strongly (such as not using alcohol) and another desired goal (such as peer acceptance). In these cases, developmental assets in the positive identity and boundaries and expectations categories play an important role in the final decision.
- **Families matter.** Research shows that family factors such as close family relationships and parents' caring and empathy for others, are key to helping young people develop strong, positive values.
- **Consistent messages are vital.** If young people are introduced to one set of values at home, another at school, another with friends, and yet another in the media and wider community, they are likely to be confused, frustrated, and unsure about what's really important. The most effective way to instill values in youth is for adults and organizations that interact with young people to work together to develop a shared understanding and expression of what matters.

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