

## Article #38

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 *social competencies*.

*You can help young people develop life skills and social competencies.*

Sometimes, all of life seems to depend on getting along well with others and navigating through new situations. In the classroom, the boardroom, and the living room, in the coffee shop, on the bus, and on the sidewalk, people of all ages need to know how to interact effectively with others, how to make difficult decisions, and how to cope with new situations.

In the developmental assets framework, the assets that help a young person achieve those goals include:

- Learning about one's own heritage, culture, and uniqueness and those of others, to further self-understanding and mutual understanding;
- Knowing how to be a good friend to members of your family, fellow students, coworkers, neighbors, and other people in your life; and
- Recognizing potentially dangerous situations, planning ahead to avoid problems and being willing and able to work through conflicts with others nonviolently.

But none of the social competencies simply “come naturally” to most young people (or to most adults, either). Tolerance, negotiation and compromise, sensitivity to others' feelings and needs, and appreciation of one's own and others' cultures need to be taught and modeled.

Here are some tips on how to “teach your children well”:

- **Remember that different folks need different strokes.** Young people develop social skills gradually over the course of childhood and adolescence, and in different ways at different times. For example, young children need supervised group playtime in small but regular doses. For young adolescents, project-oriented group activities with their peers are vital opportunities for constructive social learning.
- **Think about what's new.** It's easy for adults to forget how confusing it was when they were teenagers to face many new situations, including first dates, the first chance to drive alone, and the first party where others are drinking alcohol. We can help young people avoid making impulsive decisions in such situations by teaching them a process for making rational decisions, talking with them about possible scenarios, pointing out potential actions and consequences, and role-playing relevant conversations.
- **Give boys an extra helping hand.** The data from Search Institute's survey of nearly 200,000 young people show that for each asset in this category, girls report experiencing the asset more than boys do. It may take special, focused efforts to help boys' experiences of these assets increase.

From *Get the Word Out: Communication Tools and Ideas for Asset Builders Everywhere*. Copyright © 2003 Search Institute, 800-888-7828, [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org). To learn more about our local initiative, contact: Pulaski Community Partners Coalition, 980-3228 or visit our website [www.aboutpcpc.org](http://www.aboutpcpc.org).