

## Article #8

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 five articles we will explore the asset category *empowerment*.

*You can empower young people to make a difference in the world.*

One of these days, the young people in your home, school, neighborhood, and workplace will be the people in charge—in charge of their own lives and in charge of the world.

You can help young people get ready for their future roles by empowering them now.

Just what is empowerment? Young people are empowered when they feel valued, valuable, and safe. They need to believe that adults like them and respect them. Finally, they need plenty of opportunities to contribute to their communities through volunteering, working in paid jobs, and sharing their ideas, knowledge, and creativity.

It's not always easy to know what it takes for young people to be empowered. Here are some keys for really helping youth in your community, program, family, neighborhood, or school feel valued and valuable:

- Find safe, appropriate opportunities for young people to be leaders, decision makers, teachers, helpers, and role models for children, other youth, and adults.

- Work to ensure youth's safety at school, at home, and in their neighborhoods. *Never* tolerate any form of violence or abuse.
- Don't always do things *for* youth. It might seem easier or faster at the time. Or maybe you think you can do things better yourself. But in the long run, young people will learn and contribute more if adults do things *with* them.
- Young people don't always have the opportunities or the skills to defend themselves against negative stereotypes, assumptions, or rumors. Speak up for youth when individuals or the media say negative or judgmental things about them.
- When it comes to safety, recognize that different youth face different threats. For example, girls are more likely than boys to be physically or sexually abused, while boys are more likely than girls to get into fights.
- Whenever possible, limit the number of hours young people work during a school week to 15 or fewer. Some work can be a good thing, but too much can lead to burnout, stress, increased use of alcohol, and other negative outcomes.
- Deal openly and honestly with young people about sexuality, politics, religion, death, and other serious issues. They need to know that their questions and concerns are valid and important.

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

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