

## Article #13

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 *boundaries and expectations*.

*You can set clear boundaries and hold high expectations for young people.*

Imagine the process of growing up as a journey to adulthood. That journey can be a dangerous walk through the unknown if the young person doesn't get the help he or she needs. But if there's a good path to follow, responsible and knowledgeable travel companions, and a clear and positive destination, that journey can be a rich, fulfilling experience.

In the language of developmental assets, giving young people help on that journey is a matter of boundaries and expectations.

When we talk about boundaries, we mean creating and showing to young people a good path through life: establishing clear rules for what is okay and what is not okay, at home, at school, and out in the world, and being just as clear and fair about the consequences for breaking those rules. And when we talk about expectations, we mean surrounding young people with caring adults and peers who model responsible behaviors

(good travel companions) and who encourage them to be the best they can be (a positive destination).

As you think about guiding the young people you know and care about through the opportunities and dangers of life, keep these “trail markers” in mind:

- **Boundaries, consequences, and expectations need to be clear** and carefully explained, in language appropriate to a child’s age and understanding. As children become adolescents, it’s normal for them to question and challenge the rules and expectations set for them as they learn to think independently and make decisions for themselves. Then rules and consequences need to be negotiated.
- **Fitting the “punishment” to the “crime.”** Consequences for breaking rules are most effective when they are consistently enforced and wisely chosen. For example, a sensitive child caught smoking might respond well to an expression of disappointment, a new explanation of the reasons for not smoking, and reassurance of your regard for the child. A youth who is easily led by peers may need a change in curfew and restrictions on the time spent alone with friends.
- **Keep expectations high, yet reasonable.** Believe that every child has strengths and potential for success. Try to strike a balance between keeping standards high, yet recognizing each child’s interests, abilities, temperament, and goals.

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

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