

Article #44

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 six articles we will explore the asset category *positive identity*.

You can nurture, celebrate, and affirm young people's positive identity.

Figuring out who we are and how we fit in the world is a lifelong process, and not an easy one, for many. But numerous studies have shown that a positive attitude and high self-esteem really do have the power to brighten a young person's future. In the developmental assets framework, those ideas come under the heading of positive identity.

Simply put, young people are more likely to thrive (and less likely to get into risky behaviors) when they:

- Believe that they have the power to influence the things that happen to them;
- Feel good about themselves and their abilities; and
- Believe that their life has purpose and meaning and that their future will be positive.

You can help the young people in your neighborhood, school, workplace, and home gain these important qualities and beliefs. Here are some ideas for getting started:

- **Appreciate them for who they are.** Young people are healthiest when they learn to value and like themselves regardless of what they look like, how well they do in school, or how good they are at sports, music, or other activities. In a culture that focuses on appearance and achievement, caring adults can make a critical difference by valuing individual young people for their own particular gifts, talents, skills, contributions, and potential.

- **Commit to helping *all* young people toward a positive future.** Research shows that, in general, boys have more positive perceptions of themselves than girls do—regardless of their abilities—so watch for times when girls can benefit from a little extra encouragement, support, and praise. Having a strong, positive cultural or ethnic identity can help adolescents form positive personal identities as well.

- **Show them how to do something practical (like change a tire or plan and cook a meal), then ask them to teach *you* something, too.** In order to develop confidence in their abilities and to believe their actions and decisions matter, young people need opportunities to experience self-reliance, responsibility, and being resources to others. From *Get the Word Out: Communication Tools and Ideas for Asset Builders Everywhere*. Copyright © 2003 Search Institute, 800-888-7828, 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.