

The Asset Approach

giving kids what they need to succeed

Why do some kids grow up with ease, while others struggle? Why do some kids get involved in dangerous activities, while others spend their time contributing to society? Why do some youth “beat the odds” in difficult situations, while others get trapped?

Many factors influence why some young people have successes in life and why others have a harder time. Economic circumstances, genetics, trauma, and many other factors play a role. But these factors—which seem difficult, if not impossible, to change—aren’t all that matters. Research by Search Institute has identified 40 concrete, positive experiences and qualities—“developmental assets”—that have a tremendous influence on young people’s lives. And they are things that people from all walks of life can help to nurture.

Research shows that the 40 developmental assets help young people make wise decisions, choose positive paths, and grow up competent, caring, and responsible. The assets (see page 2) are grouped into eight categories:

- **Support**—Young people need to experience support, care, and love from their families and many others. They need organizations and institutions that provide positive, supportive environments.
- **Empowerment**—Young people need to be valued by their community and have opportunities to contribute to others. For this to occur, they must be safe and feel secure.
- **Boundaries and expectations**—Young people need to know what is expected of them and whether activities and behaviors are “in bounds” or “out of bounds.”
- **Constructive use of time**—Young people need constructive, enriching opportunities for growth through creative activities, youth programs, congregational involvement, and quality time at home.
- **Commitment to learning**—Young people need to develop a lifelong commitment to education and learning.
- **Positive values**—Youth need to develop strong values that guide their choices.
- **Social competencies**—Young people need skills and competencies that equip them to make positive choices, to build relationships, and to succeed in life.
- **Positive identity**—Young people need a strong sense of their own power, purpose, worth, and promise.

The asset framework is a framework that includes everyone. Families, schools, neighborhoods, congregations, and all organizations, institutions, and individuals in a community can play a role in building assets for youth. This brochure introduces the assets, shows their power and presence in young people’s lives, and gives concrete suggestions for what you can do to build assets.



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40 Developmental Assets

Search Institute has identified the following building blocks of healthy development that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. Percentages of young people who experience each asset represent almost 100,000 6th- to 12th-grade youth surveyed in 213 towns and cities in the United States.

ASSET TYPE

ASSET NAME AND DEFINITION

ASSET TYPE	ASSET NAME AND DEFINITION	PERCENTAGE
EXTERNAL ASSETS	Support	
	1. Family support—Family life provides high levels of love and support.	64%
	2. Positive family communication—Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parent(s).	26%
	3. Other adult relationships—Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.	41%
	4. Caring neighborhood—Young person experiences caring neighbors.	40%
	5. Caring school climate—School provides a caring, encouraging environment.	24%
	6. Parent involvement in schooling—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.	29%
	Empowerment	
	7. Community values youth—Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.	20%
	8. Youth as resources—Young people are given useful roles in the community.	24%
	9. Service to others—Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.	50%
	10. Safety—Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.	55%
	Boundaries and Expectations	
	11. Family boundaries—Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.	43%
	12. School boundaries—School provides clear rules and consequences.	46%
	13. Neighborhood boundaries—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.	46%
	14. Adult role models—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.	27%
	15. Positive peer influence—Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.	60%
	16. High expectations—Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.	41%
	Constructive Use of Time	
17. Creative activities—Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.	19%	
18. Youth programs—Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community.	59%	
19. Religious community—Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.	64%	
20. Time at home—Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.	50%	
INTERNAL ASSETS	Commitment to Learning	
	21. Achievement motivation—Young person is motivated to do well in school.	63%
	22. School engagement—Young person is actively engaged in learning.	64%
	23. Homework—Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.	45%
	24. Bonding to school—Young person cares about her or his school.	51%
	25. Reading for pleasure—Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.	24%
	Positive Values	
	26. Caring—Young person places high value on helping other people.	43%
	27. Equality and social justice—Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.	45%
	28. Integrity—Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.	63%
	29. Honesty—Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy."	63%
	30. Responsibility—Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.	60%
	31. Restraint—Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.	42%
	Social Competencies	
	32. Planning and decision making—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.	29%
	33. Interpersonal competence—Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.	43%
	34. Cultural competence—Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.	35%
	35. Resistance skills—Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.	37%
	36. Peaceful conflict resolution—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.	44%
	Positive Identity	
37. Personal power—Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."	45%	
38. Self-esteem—Young person reports having a high self-esteem.	47%	
39. Sense of purpose—Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."	55%	
40. Positive view of personal future—Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.	70%	

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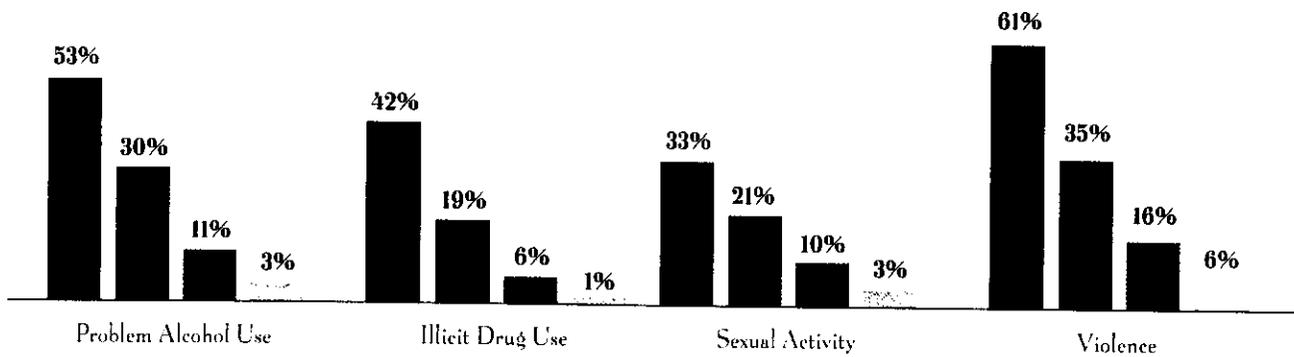
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The Power of Assets

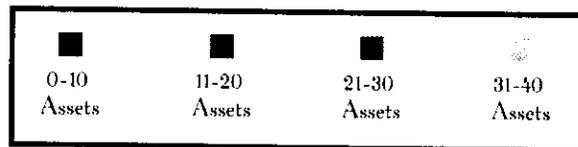
On one level, the 40 developmental assets represent everyday wisdom about positive experiences and characteristics for young people. In addition, Search Institute research has found that these assets are powerful influences on adolescent behavior—both protecting young people from many different problem behaviors and promoting positive attitudes and behaviors. This power is evident across all cultural and socioeconomic groups of youth. There is also evidence from other research that assets may have the same kind of power for younger children.

Protecting Youth from High-Risk Behaviors

Assets have tremendous power to protect youth from many different harmful or unhealthy choices. To illustrate, these charts show that youth with the most assets are least likely to engage in four different patterns of high-risk behavior. (For definitions of each problem behavior, see page 7.)

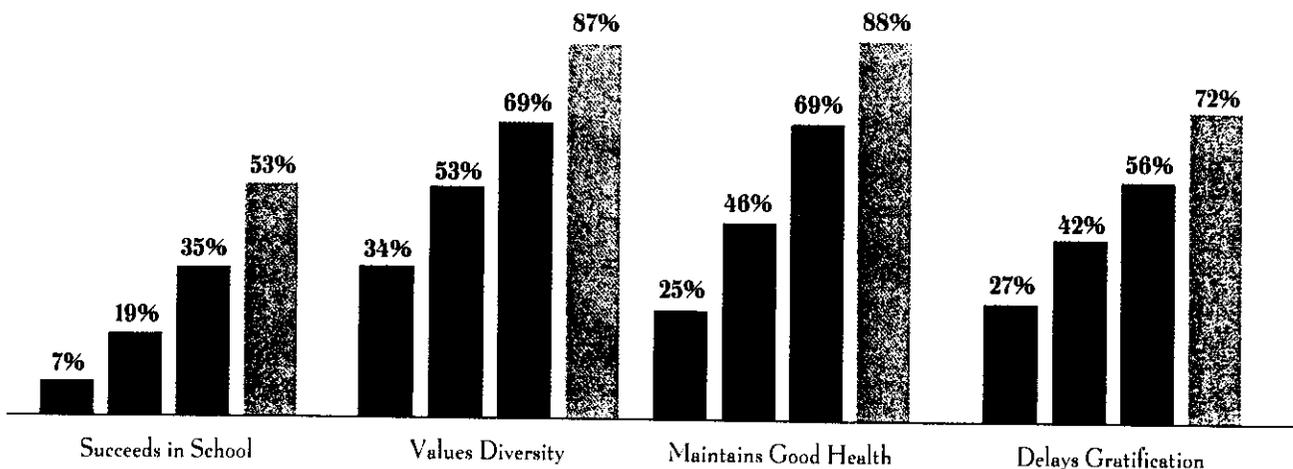


The same kind of impact is evident with many other problem behaviors, including tobacco use, depression and attempted suicide, antisocial behavior, school problems, driving and alcohol, and gambling.



Promoting Positive Attitudes and Behaviors

In addition to protecting youth from negative behaviors, having more assets increases the chances that young people will have positive attitudes and behaviors, as these charts show. (For definitions of each thriving behavior, see page 7.)

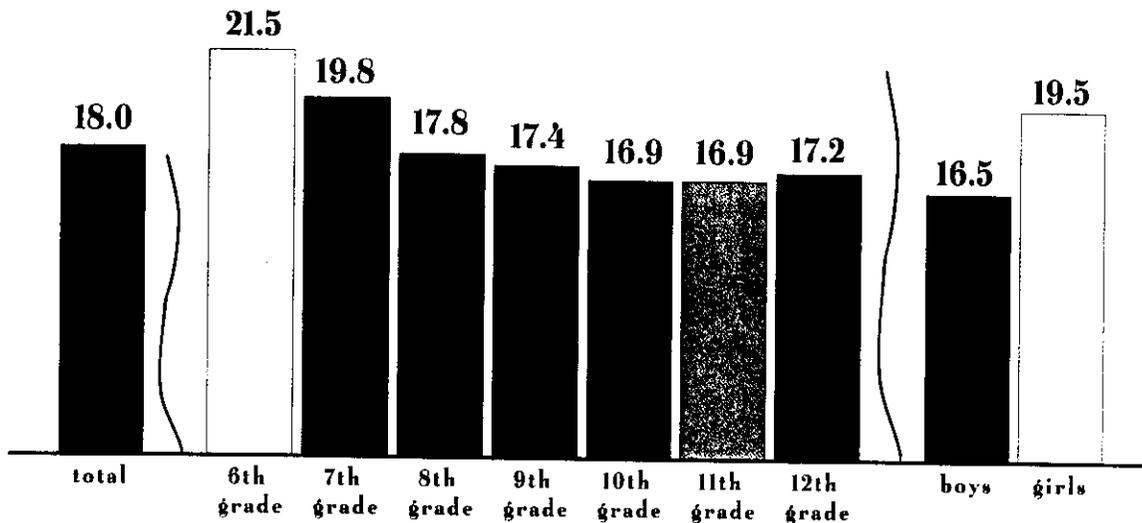


The Challenge Facing Communities

While the assets are powerful shapers of young people's lives and choices, too few young people experience many of these assets. Twenty-five of the 40 assets are experienced by less than half of the young people surveyed.

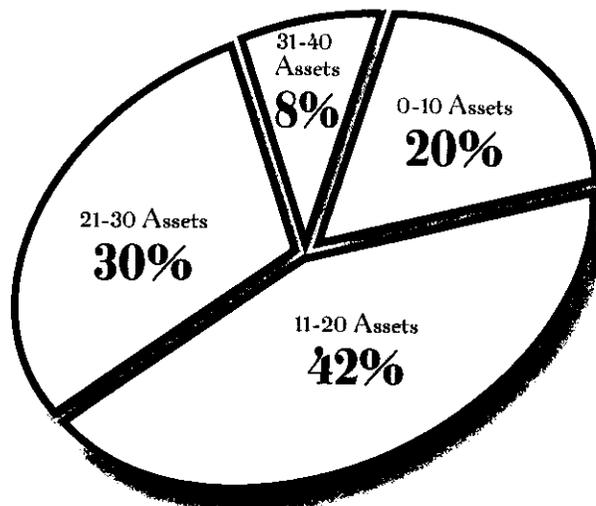
Average Number of Assets by Grade and Gender

The average young person surveyed experiences only 18 of the 40 assets. In general, older youth have lower average levels of assets than younger youth. And boys experience fewer assets than girls.



Youth with Different Levels of Assets

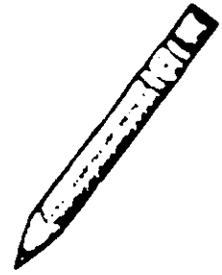
Ideally, all youth would experience at least 31 of these 40 assets. Yet, as this chart shows, only 8 percent of youth experience this level of assets. Sixty-two percent experience fewer than 20 of the assets.



What goal would you set for young people in your community, organization, neighborhood, or family?

An Asset Checklist

Many people find it helpful to use a simple checklist to reflect on the assets young people experience. This checklist simplifies the asset list to help prompt conversation in families, organizations, and communities. *NOTE: This checklist is not intended nor appropriate as a scientific or accurate measurement of developmental assets.*



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- 1. I receive high levels of love and support from family members.
 - 2. I can go to my parent(s) or guardian(s) for advice and support and have frequent, in-depth conversations with them.
 - 3. I know some nonparent adults I can go to for advice and support.
 - 4. My neighbors encourage and support me.
 - 5. My school provides a caring, encouraging environment.
 - 6. My parent(s) or guardian(s) help me succeed in school.
 - 7. I feel valued by adults in my community.
 - 8. I am given useful roles in my community.
 - 9. I serve in the community one hour or more each week.
 - 10. I feel safe at home, at school, and in the neighborhood.
 - 11. My family sets standards for appropriate conduct and monitors my whereabouts.
 - 12. My school has clear rules and consequences for behavior.
 - 13. Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring my behavior.
 - 14. Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.
 - 15. My best friends model responsible behavior.
 - 16. My parent(s)/guardian(s) and teachers encourage me to do well.
 - 17. I spend three hours or more each week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.
 - 18. I spend three hours or more each week in school or community sports, clubs, or organizations.
 - 19. I spend one hour or more each week in religious services or participating in spiritual activities.
 - 20. I go out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights each week.
 - 21. I want to do well in school.
 - 22. I am actively engaged in learning.
 - 23. I do an hour or more of homework each school day.
 - 24. I care about my school.
 - 25. I read for pleasure three or more hours each week.
 - 26. I believe it is really important to help other people.
 - 27. I want to help promote equality and reduce world poverty and hunger.
 - 28. I can stand up for what I believe.
 - 29. I tell the truth even when it's not easy.
 - 30. I can accept and take personal responsibility.
 - 31. I believe it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.
 - 32. I am good at planning ahead and making decisions.
 - 33. I am good at making and keeping friends.
 - 34. I know and am comfortable with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.
 - 35. I can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
 - 36. I try to resolve conflict nonviolently.
 - 37. I believe I have control over many things that happen to me.
 - 38. I feel good about myself.
 - 39. I believe my life has a purpose.
 - 40. I am optimistic about my future.

How You Can . . . On Your Own Build Assets

Everyone—parents and guardians, grandparents, teachers, coaches, friends, youth workers, employers, youth, and others—can build assets. It doesn't necessarily take a lot of money. But it can make a tremendous difference in raising

confident, caring young people. What it takes is building relationships, spending time together, and being intentional about nurturing positive values and commitments. Some things you can do:

- ▶ Get to know the names of kids who live around you. Find out what interests them.
- ▶ Get to know what young people around you are really like, not just how they are portrayed in the media.
- ▶ Eat at least one meal together every day as a family. Take time to talk about what's going on in each other's lives.
- ▶ Volunteer as a tutor, mentor, or youth leader in a youth-serving program.

. . . In Your Organization

If you're involved in an organization such as a school, youth organization, congregation, family service agency, health-care provider, or business—either as an employee or volunteer—you can encourage asset-building action within that organization. Some possibilities:

- ▶ Educate your constituency, employees, or customers about their potential as asset builders.
- ▶ Develop policies that allow parents to be involved in their children's lives and that encourage all employees to get involved with kids in the community.
- ▶ Contribute time, talent, or resources to support community asset-building efforts.
- ▶ Develop or strengthen programs and activities that build assets, such as mentoring, service-learning activities, peer helping, and recreation.

. . . In Your Community

Hundreds of communities across the United States are discovering the power and potential of uniting efforts for asset building. They involve people from all parts of the community in shaping and coordinating strategies that will help all young people be more likely to succeed. You can use your influence in the community to:

- ▶ Talk about asset building with formal and informal leaders and other influential people you know. Get their support for asset building.
- ▶ Conduct a survey to measure the asset levels of young people in your community. (Call Search Institute for information.)
- ▶ Develop opportunities for youth to contribute to the community through sharing their perspectives and taking action and leadership.
- ▶ Celebrate and honor the commitments of people who dedicate their lives and time to children and youth.

Six Keys to Asset Building

It doesn't cost a lot of money or require special training to build developmental assets. Here are six keys to guide asset-building action.

- 1. Everyone can build assets.** Building assets requires consistent messages across a community. All adults, youth, and children play a role.
- 2. All young people need assets.** While it is crucial to pay special attention to those youth who have the least (economically or emotionally), nearly all young people need more assets than they have.
- 3. Relationships are key.** Strong relationships between adults and young people, young people and their peers, and teenagers and children are central to asset building.
- 4. Asset building is an ongoing process.** Building assets starts when a child is born and continues through high school and beyond.
- 5. Consistent messages are important.** Young people need to receive consistent messages about what's important and what's expected from their families, schools, communities, the media, and other sources.
- 6. Intentional redundancy is important.** Assets must be continually reinforced across the years and in all areas of a young person's life.

About the Research in this Brochure

Search Institute has been studying developmental assets in youth in communities since 1989, using a survey called *Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors*. In 1996, the current framework of 40 developmental assets was released. The data in this brochure is based on surveys during the 1996-97 school year of 99,462 6th- to 12th-grade public school students in 213 towns and cities in 25 states.

How Problem Behaviors and Thriving Indicators Were Defined

Here is how each of the behaviors and attitudes shown in the charts on page 3 were defined in the survey. *Note that the definitions of high-risk behaviors are set rather high, suggesting ongoing problems, not experimentation.*

High-Risk Behavior Patterns

- ▶ *Problem Alcohol Use*—Has used alcohol three or more times in the past 30 days or got drunk once or more in the past two weeks.
- ▶ *Illicit Drug Use*—Used illicit drugs (cocaine, LSD, PCP or angel dust, heroin, and amphetamines) three or more times in the past 12 months.
- ▶ *Sexual Activity*—Has had sexual intercourse three or more times in lifetime.
- ▶ *Violence*—Has engaged in three or more acts of fighting, hitting, injuring a person, carrying a weapon, or threatening physical harm in the past 12 months.

Thriving Attitudes and Behaviors

- ▶ *Succeeds in School*—Gets mostly A's on report card.
- ▶ *Values Diversity*—Places high importance on getting to know people of other racial/ethnic groups.
- ▶ *Maintains Good Health*—Pays attention to healthy nutrition and exercise.
- ▶ *Delays Gratification*—Saves money for something special rather than spending it all right away.

About Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth

This brochure is part of Search Institute's national Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth initiative, which seeks to equip communities across the country to build assets for youth. This initiative is underwritten by Lutheran Brotherhood, a not-for-profit organization providing financial services and community service opportunities for Lutherans nationwide. Search Institute's work on asset building also has received support from the Blandin Foundation, the Cargill Foundation, the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Search Institute also leads *Assets for Colorado Youth*, a statewide initiative that seeks to mobilize all Coloradans to build assets in children and adolescents. Major support for *Assets for Colorado Youth* is provided by The Colorado Trust.

Search Institute is a nonprofit, nonsectarian organization whose mission is to advance the well-being of adolescents and children by generating knowledge and promoting its application. The institute conducts research and evaluation, develops publications and practical tools, and provides training and technical assistance.

For More Information About Asset Building

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Assets for Colorado Youth
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tools for asset builders

Here is a sampling of asset-building resources available from Search Institute.

101 Asset-Building Actions is a full-color poster that lists the 40 assets and gives ideas for individuals and organizations on how to build assets. Portions of the poster are bilingual (English and Spanish).

All Kids Are Our Kids is the groundbreaking book by Search Institute President Peter L. Benson that gives in-depth information on the assets and how communities can mobilize individuals and organizations to build assets in young people.

Assets: The Magazine of Ideas for Healthy Communities & Healthy Youth offers information and strategies for building assets and promoting positive youth development in kids. The magazine has ideas, stories, and resources for individuals, organizations, and community-wide initiatives that care about young people. To subscribe, call 800-869-6882.

Parenting with a Purpose is a booklet that challenges parents to view parenting through the asset framework, highlighting how the assets can reshape major parenting tasks and suggesting ways parents can find support in their community.

Starting Out Right: Developmental Assets for Children offers new frameworks for understanding and building the foundation that children from birth through age 11 need to begin a healthy life. It blends Search Institute's extensive research on adolescence with the literature on child development and the practical wisdom of people who work with and care for children.

What Kids Needs to Succeed is an easy-to-read book that shows the importance of helping youth make positive life choices and gives practical ideas for building each developmental asset.

Introducing Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth is an informational handout that provides an overview of the Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth initiative and Search Institute. It opens to a colorful poster of asset-building ideas.



For more information on these resources and others, contact Search Institute, 700 South Third Street, Suite 210, Minneapolis, MN 55415. Toll-free: 800-888-7828. Web: www.search-institute.org.