

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
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%
Boundaries and Expectations	10. Safety—Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.	55%
	11. Family boundaries—Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.	43%
Constructive Use of Time	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%
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%
Positive Identity	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%
	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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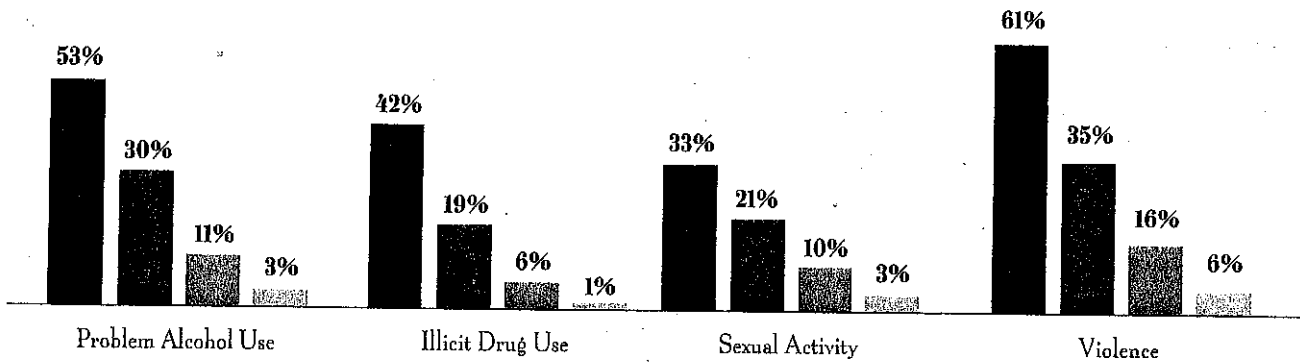
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The Power of Assets

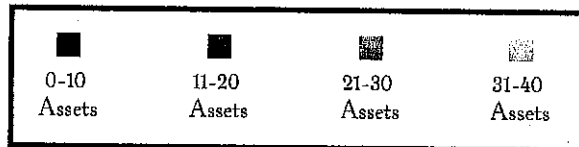
On one level, the 40 developmental assets represent everyday wisdom about positive experiences and characteristics for young people. In addition, Search Institute research has found that these assets are powerful influences on adolescent behavior—both protecting young people from many different problem 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.)

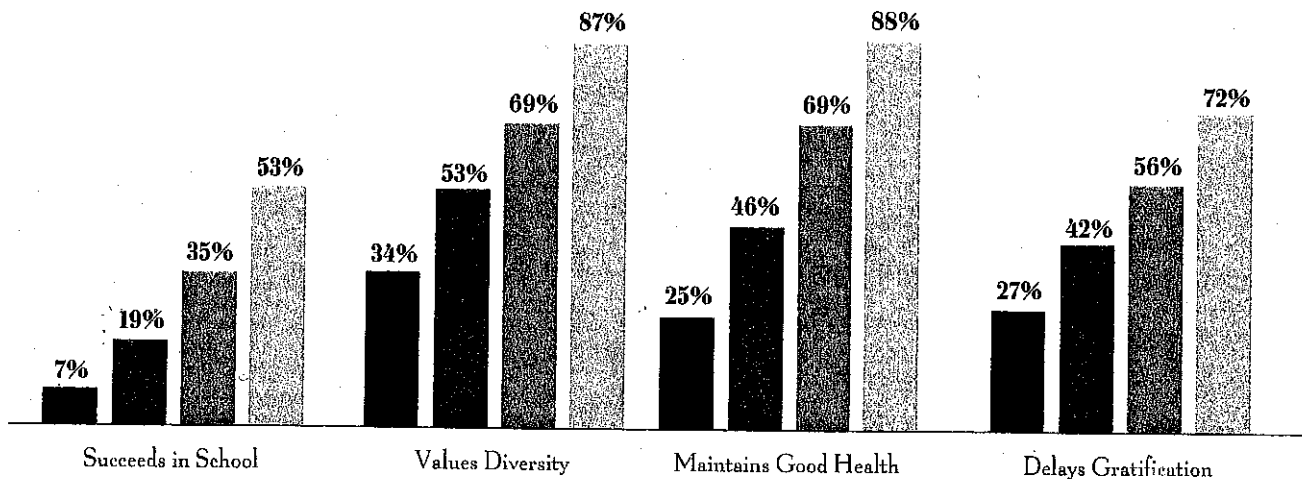


The same kind of impact is evident with many other problem behaviors, including tobacco use, depression and attempted suicide, antisocial behavior, school problems, driving and alcohol, and gambling.



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.)





FACT SHEET

Developmental Assets[®] and Suicide Prevention

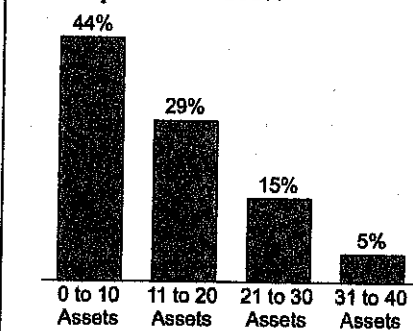
The recent announcement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that rates of suicide among 10- to 24-year-olds increased 8 percent between 2003 and 2004—the largest single-year increase in 15 years—has drawn new attention to the third leading cause of death among young people.¹ What can be done to promote strengths or protective factors that help to reduce levels of suicide?

Many factors play roles in young people's depression and suicide. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) identifies a wide range of risk factors, including depression and other mental disorders, substance-abuse disorders (the two most common risk factors), stressful life events, and a family history of suicide or violence.²

Serious mental disorders and substance-abuse disorders require professional intervention. In addition, however, research from Search Institute shows that promoting healthy development can also play an early and important role in cultivating protective factors. This approach is captured in the framework of Developmental Assets (40 experiences, relationships, opportunities, and personal qualities that young people need to grow up healthy, caring, and responsible). It emphasizes the positive, proactive ways that parents, other caring adults, and youth themselves can contribute to young people being resilient in the face of life's challenges.

- **A powerful approach**—The more Developmental Assets young people experience, the less likely they are to frequently be depressed and/or to have attempted suicide. Search Institute studies of almost 3 million young people consistently show a connection between levels of Developmental Assets and depression or attempted suicide (Figure 1). This relationship holds true for young people from all racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- **Powerful assets**—No single asset makes all the difference in depression or attempted suicide. In fact, the power of assets comes when young people experience many Developmental Assets in many places at many times. However, some categories of Developmental Assets do have a particularly strong relationship to lower levels of depression and/or attempted suicide among teenagers. They are Positive Identity, Support, and Empowerment.
- **The centrality of relationships**—At the core of asset building is a focus on building relationships. This approach is consistent with research showing that positive peer and family relationships are critical to youth development. Nurturing young people in a web of positive relationships cultivates the strengths they need to avoid some risk factors and increases the protective factors that help them overcome the stresses they face.
- **A complementary strategy**—An asset-building approach does not replace but instead complements other medical, policy, and environmental strategies aimed at reducing teenage suicide. It addresses some of the environmental factors that can exacerbate or mitigate the biochemical or genetic factors that underlie depression and suicide. It also helps ensure that young people have other people to support and encourage them—and to help them seek the professional services they need if they become clinically depressed or suicidal.

Figure 1: Percentages of youth who frequently experience depression or have attempted suicide, by levels of Developmental Assets³



¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2007, September 9-15). Suicide trends among youths and young adults aged 10–24 years. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 56 (35), 905–908.

² National Institute of Mental Health (2008). Suicide in the U.S.: Statistics and Prevention [Web site]. NIH Publication No. 06-4594. Available at <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/suicide-in-the-us-statistics-and-prevention.shtml>

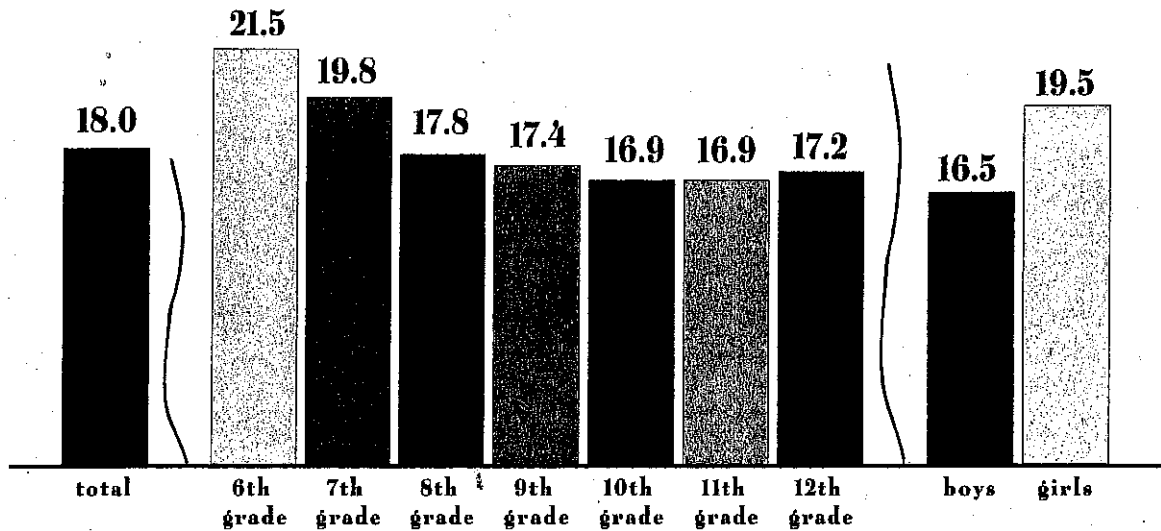
³ Based on Search Institute surveys of 150,000 students in grades 6 to 12. See Benson, P. L. (2006). *All kids are our kids: What communities must do to raise caring and responsible children and adolescents* (2nd ed.) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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.

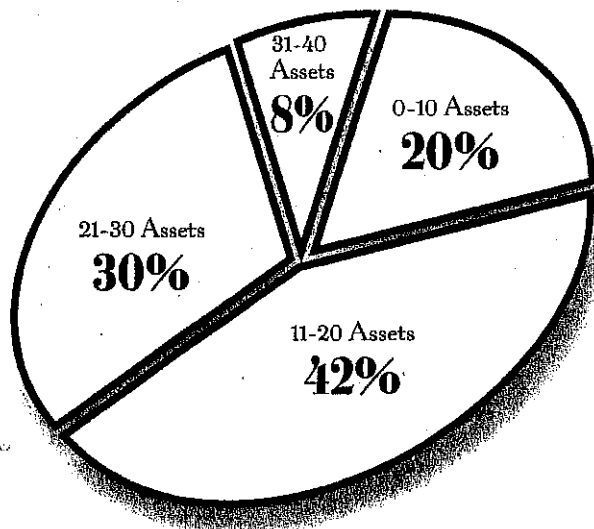
Average Number of Assets by Grade and Gender

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?

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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More info on building 2 Key Internal Assets: Self-Esteem and Positive View of Future

from the book "What Kids need to Succeed" by Benson, Galbraith, and Espeland.

#38 Self Esteem: Teens feel good about themselves

In the home:

- Express how much you love them regularly and often.
- Put positive post it note messages around their room.
- Find and celebrate their uniqueness, affirm it.
- If your child makes a mistake separate the deed from the doer. The action was bad not the teen.
- Listen with respect, do not interrupt, and talk without yelling.
- Give reasonable explanations for when you say no. This is just common courtesy.
- Have your teens keep a journal or portfolio of accomplishments and celebrate family successes.
- Celebrate and take pride in your cultural heritage.
- Help them gain competence in developing new skills and affirm their accomplishments.
- Point out how advertisements/TV/Media may make people feel not good enough. Compare these sometimes distorted images of success with reality and feelings of self worth. What does it mean to be good enough? Tell them they already are.

In school

- Grade honestly but try to find positive comments. Give constructive criticism with suggestion for improvements.
- Ask students opinions and suggestions where you can and affirm their abilities and achievements.
- Teach students to accept criticism and respond in positive ways.
- Treat all students with respect, encourage and ensure everyone contributes to class discussions.
- Identify and affirm individual talents.

In the community.

- Involve young people in planning community events and celebrate their accomplishments.
- Take time to pay attention to young people. For example, while waiting in line near youth, demonstrate that you value them and enjoy talking with them.
- Offer community classes on strengthening self-esteem: topics include positive self-talk, accepting complements, asking for what they need, learning from mistakes.
- Invite experts to speak to children on self-esteem.

In the congregation:

- Accept and affirm all young people for who they are. Recognize and affirm individual talents, abilities, and accomplishments.
- Hold workshops and seminars for parents on building self-esteem in their youth.
- Feature brief biographies in the worship bulletin of young people in your congregation.

#40 Positive View of personal future: Teens are optimistic about their future.

In the home:

- Model hopefulness and optimism, look forward to your future and their future with joyful anticipation.
- Encourage your children's dreams. Help them make plans to realize them.
- Eliminate pessimistic phrases such as "It won't work", or "you can't do that by yourself" Try: "why not try it", or "I can help you do that".
- Pay particular attention to signs of hope in the community and in the world. Highlight them. Do not just focus on the negative, what is wrong with the present, or frightening about the future.
- Teach them how to acknowledge fears and put them into perspective. Show them how to deal with negative, scary or difficult situations when they arise.
- Take time to enjoy life and teach your children to notice and appreciate beauty around them whether it is a beautiful sunset, dinner, funny show, a song or planting a garden.
- Be spontaneous as it is essentially hopeful. Occasionally drop everything to play with your kids. You chose to do something suddenly because you expect to have a good time.

At school:

- Encourage and support students in pursuing their dreams
- Expose students to positive role models whose backgrounds are similar to theirs.
- Create a climate of optimism. Expect your students to succeed. Accompany a low grade with an encouraging note. "I know you'll do better next time."

In the community:

- Help young people to set personal goals that inspire hope.
- Encourage teens to name their fears-things that might stop them from reaching their goals. Once fears are named they can be addressed and dealt with.
- Affirm and publicize the good things about your community. Be optimistic about its future.
- Make a public statement about the community's commitment to the well-being of youth. Make a list of ways your community will work towards this commitment. Inspire community wide optimism.

In the congregation:

- Encourage kids to talk about their hopes and dreams.
- Pass on to young people the hope that is integral to your faith tradition.
- Do projects that point to a more hopeful future. Instead of always addressing problems, identify areas of hope, creativity, and new life and encourage kids to get involved.