Developmental assets for children and youth

“Developmental assets” are factors—both external and internal—that decrease the likelihood that young people will engage in risky behavior and increase the chances they will grow up to be healthy, caring, and responsible adults.

The following framework, developed by Search Institute (a research and training organization in Minneapolis), identifies 40 factors, or “assets,” that are critical for young people’s growth and development. The first 20 of these assets are external—positive experiences that children and youth should be receiving. The next 20 are internal—qualities that young people should (with the help of adults, communities, and institutions) be developing within themselves. The list presented here is for adolescents grades 6–12.

**EXTERNAL ASSETS**

The first 20 developmental assets focus on positive experiences that young people should receive from the people and institutions in their lives. Four categories of external assets are included in the framework:

**1. Support**

Young people need to experience support, care, and love from their families, neighbors, and many others. They need organizations and institutions that provide positive, supportive environments. The developmental assets in this category include:

* Family support—Family life provides high levels of love and support
* Positive family communication—Young person and his/her parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parent(s)
* Other adult relationships—Young person receives support from non-parent adults
* Caring neighborhood—Young person experiences caring neighbors
* Caring school climate—School provides a caring, encouraging environment
* Parent involvement in schooling—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school

**2. 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. The developmental assets in this category include:

* The community values youth—Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth
* Youth as resources—Young people are given useful roles in the community
* Service to others—Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week
* Safety—Young person feels safe at home, at school, and in the neighborhood

**3. 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.” The developmental assets in this category include:

* Family boundaries—Family has clear rules and consequences, and monitors the young person’s whereabouts
* School boundaries—School provides clear rules and consequences
* Neighborhood boundaries—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people’s behavior
* Adult role models—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior
* Positive peer influence—Young person’s best friends model responsible behavior
* High expectations—Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well

**4. Constructive Use of Time**

Young people need constructive, enriching opportunities for growth through creative activities, youth programs, congregational involvement, and quality time at home. The developmental assets in this category include:

* Creative activities—Young person spends three or more hours a week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts
* Youth programs—Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in community organizations
* Religious community—Young person spends one hour or more a week in activities in a religious institution
* Time at home—Young person is out with friends “with nothing special to do” two or fewer nights per week

**INTERNAL ASSETS**

A community’s responsibility for its young does not end with the provision of external assets. There needs to be a similar commitment to nurturing the internalized qualities that guide choices and create a sense of purpose and focus. Four categories of internal assets are included in the framework:

**1. Commitment to Learning**

Young people need to develop a lifelong commitment to education and learning. The developmental assets in this category include:

* Motivation for achievement—Young person is motivated to do well in school
* School engagement—Young person is actively engaged in learning
* Homework—Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day
* Bonding to school—Young person cares about her or his school
* Reading for pleasure—Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week

**2. Positive Values**

Youth need to develop strong values that guide their choices. The developmental assets in this category include:

* Caring—Young person places high value on helping other people
* Equality and social justice—Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty
* Integrity—Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs
* Honesty—Young person “tells the truth even when it is not easy”
* Responsibility—Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility
* Restraint—Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs

**3. Social Competencies**

Young people need skills and competencies that equip them to make positive choices, to build relationships, and to succeed in life. The developmental assets in this category include:

* Planning and decision making—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices
* Interpersonal competence—Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills
* Cultural competence—Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds
* Resistance skills—Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations
* Peaceful conflict resolution—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently

**4. Positive Identity**

Young people need a strong sense of their own power, purpose, worth, and promise. The

developmental assets in this category include:

* Personal power—Young person feels he or she has control over “things that happen to me”
* Self-esteem—Young person reports having a high self-esteem
* Sense of purpose—Young person reports that “my life has purpose”
* Positive view of personal future—Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future

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