

How to Become an Asset Builder

"Our chief want is someone who will inspire us to be what we know we could be."
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Developmental Assets

Children are sponges and absorb everything that surrounds them. They develop traits and characteristics based on their environment and what is taught to them. [The Search Institute](#) has identified 8 assets (support, empowerment, boundaries, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity) that are critical in promoting children's healthy development. Assets are broken up into two categories, external and internal. The more assets a child has, the more likely they are to exhibit "thriving indicators" like success in school, helping others, demonstrating leadership, and overcoming adversity. On the other hand, children with fewer developmental assets are more likely to struggle in school, engage in antisocial behavior (fighting, bullying) and have poorer relationships with others (friends, family, teachers etc).

The good news is that most of the "assets" are things that children can acquire and that the adults in children's lives can play a huge role in helping children develop these assets. This is where you come in!

We'll concentrate on the external assets:

- Support
- Empowerment
- Boundaries
- Constructive use of time.

Here are a few tips to help you cultivate some of those assets:

- **Provide Support.** Help them complete tasks and set goals.
- **Express Care.** Show them that you like them for who they are. Ask questions about them. Kids need to know that they are surrounded by adults who care about them and accept them for who they are.
- **Share Power.** Let them share in the decision making process about which activities you do. For example, give them 3 options of activities to do (or choices of books to read) and let them decide.
- **Set Boundaries.** Kids actually like boundaries (even though often it doesn't seem like it). Its important for you to be clear about what kind of behavior is appropriate (and what's not). If they are consistently breaking rules in a game, tell them that you won't play that game with them anymore if they don't start following the rules. Follow through with what you say.
- **Challenge Growth.** Set high expectations. All children are capable of growth and very capable of seeing the good in themselves if pushed toward it.

Fun Questions for Conversation

1. **“Tell me the 5 best things about you.”** This can start a conversation about positive characteristics, boosting self-esteem, and/or personal value.
2. **“Who is your best friend? Why is he/she your best friend? What makes a good friend?”** You can converse and discuss what a good friend is and why it is important to look for friends that have positive characteristics.
3. **“What do you want to be when you grow up?”** This is a simple question but it will allow you to get to know your student better and know what they hope for their future. And if they are not sure, you can focus on finding out what they like to do and helping them figure out what they are interested in.
4. **“If a genie gave you one wish, what would it be?”** This answer could be serious or silly, either way it is a good question to get a conversation going about what is important to that child. When they answer, never tell them it is a silly answer, or that they should wish for something else. Make sure you are making them feel valued and heard, no matter what the conversation may turn to.

Activity Ideas

At times, it's easier to get kids to open up if you engage in an activity that allows them to focus their attention on something else. Consider building with legos, beading, coloring or playing a game.

Coloring books, word searching, tic-tac-toe boards are also wonderful activities used to engage while talking.