



## **Introduction to Developmental Assets** **Adopted from Derek Peterson,** **Child and Youth Advocate, Association of Alaska School Boards**

Developmental Assets turn our focus to risks of young people following the theory that if children and adolescents learn life skills such as communication, stress management, decision making, and goal setting early in life they are less likely to choose risky behaviors thus true primary prevention is occurring.

The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System assesses the primary risk taking behaviors of youth. The YRBSS commonly refers to the CDC 6 among youth as inactivity, poor nutritional choices, risky sexual behavior, tobacco use, alcohol and other drug abuse, and injuries.

To honestly prevent young people from choosing risky behaviors the Search Institute introduced the Developmental Assets Approach. Below is a description of an activity that demonstrates the importance of asset building. The Say portion is the instructor leading the session. ***PLEASE READ THROUGH IT CAREFULLY -***

### **INTRODUCTION: WHAT KIDS NEED TO SUCCEED.**

1. Say, “ Did you know that the more a parent and community is involved in the education of a child/youth, the more likely that child/youth is to succeed in school?”
2. Say, “Did you also know that the better a child does in school, the more successful they will be in life?”
3. Say, “While probably most all of you agree with the first statement, there are probably a few who disagree with the second statement. We all know examples of people, who despite getting average or poor grades in school, went on to become extremely successful in life. To prove this point, did you know that in 1991 the US Dept. of Education surveyed parents and found that 71% of them said they would rather have their sons and/or daughters get C’s in school and be good in sports, than get straight A’s.”
4. Say, “We all know men and women who have become huge successes, in spite of their school performance. This is true. However, for this presentation we need to re-define success. For the sake of this presentation, success is not the size of your house, kind of car you drive, the amount of money in your bank account, or your professional title. For if those are your definitions, you are right, how well you do in high school is not an indicator. However, if you define it as the number of options you have available to you at any given time, then it works. The more success in school, the more options you have available.”

## **Q & A/BUILDING THE SAFETY NET**

1. Say, “In the next ten minutes you are going to tell me what I need to build a strong foundation for my life. I need things inside me and outside me, from you all. Examples of things that I need from inside are self-esteem and goals. Things I need that come from outside of me are caring teachers and rules from my parents.”
2. Blow up a balloon and explain that it is a child. Bounce the balloon off your finger and explain that each time you bop the balloon that it is a “protective factor.” One bop = one protective factor.
3. Explain that the floor represents “risk behaviors.” If the balloon touches the floor, it participates in drug use, alcohol use, tobacco use, violence, depression, school failure, etc.
4. Ask, “I need five volunteers.” Get five people from audience. Identify people you know. Say, “Five is key in resiliency research. It says there needs to be five key people in a youth’s life.”
5. Explain that you will pass the yarn to build a safety net. Each strand represents one protective factor or one asset. Instruct participants to hold it tight. Say, “If you can’t think of anything, just say ‘Pass.’” Stop at ten strands in the safety net. Keep track. Explain that ten assets or less puts kids ‘at- risk. **To review a list of all the assets, go to:**

<http://www.search-institute.org/content/40-developmental-assets-adolescents-ages-12-18>

**Be sure to click on Take Action to see examples of how to implement the assets.**

## **TESTING THE SAFETY NET**

1. Drop the balloon (a metaphor for a child) into net. Say, “Notice how the balloon gets through in some places, but is caught in others.”
2. Continue to identify assets, while building a strand for each. “What else do kids need to succeed?” Stop at 18. Say, “18 is the average number of assets that exist in youth in America. Almost 1 million 6th-19th graders have been surveyed by the SEARCH Institute and the typical kid in America has 18 assets.”
3. Ask the audience, “How can we get the holes smaller?” (The answer that will usually come is, “Add more people.”) Add four to ten more people. Keep asking, “What do kids need to succeed?” Add another 12 assets. Now we have about 30 assets. Take the balloon (the child). Now it will not hit the floor.
4. Say, “Folks are getting tired of building safety nets. Politicians, citizens, public figures, and community members are talking about the wasted efforts of safety nets.
5. Say, “This is the power of assets. Because we cannot legislate values. We will always have alcohol in our communities, pornography on the Internet, and violence in the media. However, with people working together to build these assets in youth, they are able to guide a youth, to help him reframe and understand the world around him.”

6. Say, “Assets are also about ‘free will.’ The more assets you have the more able a youth is to say, ‘I did this on purpose.’ We have too many kids who simply fall into drug use, tobacco use, and other unhealthy choices. When you ask them why they smoke they often respond ‘I don’t know.’” A youth with 30 or more assets may choose to do unhealthy behaviors, but after some direction from the people holding their web, they are put back on.

Please answer the following questions and bring them with you to discuss and turn in at our next class meeting.

- These are the 40 developmental assets as identified by the SEARCH institute. Explain two of them were you surprised to see on the list and why.
- The Search Institute now developed a list of 40 assets for preschool children and children Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade, how can more communities, schools, and parents use the asset model as a successful mechanism for preventing risk taking behaviors of our youth? Provide one example.
- Outline two ideas on how a health teacher could incorporate the concept of assets development in his/her classroom.