HEALTHY COMMUNITIES
HEALTHY YOUTH

Newsletter #41

ideas for parents

Practical Suggestions for Building Assets in Your Child

FAST FACTS

ASSET #33: Interpersonal Competence

Youth are more likely to grow up healthy when they have empathy, sensitivity, and friendship-making skills.

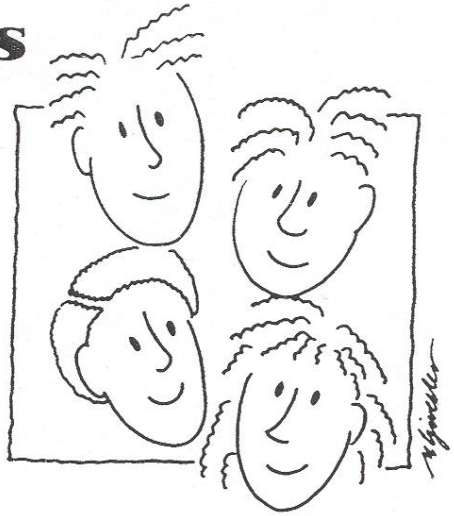
43% *of youth surveyed by Search Institute have this asset in their lives.**

What Are Assets?

Assets are 40 key building blocks to help kids succeed. "Interpersonal competence" is one of five social competencies assets.

* Based on Search Institute surveys of almost 100,000 6th- to 12th-grade youth throughout the United States.

The Complexities of Interpersonal Competence



From a glance, interpersonal competence seems easy. Most children know how to make friends. They get upset when something bad happens to a friend, and they notice when someone is acting differently. They display some sense of sensitivity.

Yet interpersonal competence involves not only a young person's relationship-making and -keeping skills but also emotional competence. According to Daniel Goleman, Ph.D., author of *Emotional Intelligence*, interpersonal competence builds on emotional skills such as:

- Monitoring your own expressions of your feelings.
- Being able to read people's reactions and feelings—even when people don't articulate them in words.
- Adjusting social interaction based on the interaction you're having with another person or a group of people.

This competence is tricky even for adults, especially since some people's emotions are easier to read than others'. Yet, young people who practice the skills of being in touch with their own needs and feelings and know how to appropriately express their feelings are more likely to understand and deal with the needs and feelings of others.

Building interpersonal competence is a lifelong process. Each relationship and each interaction matters. Each relationship and each interaction allows young people to practice, learn, and master the skill of empathy, sensitivity, and friendship building.

Quick Tip: Examine how you interact with people.

Helpful Hints

Tips that make building interpersonal skills in your child easier:

- ***Practice interpersonal skills, such as meeting people, starting conversations, asking questions, and finding similar interests.***
- ***Invite people over for dinner regularly. Invite your children's friends. Invite your friends. As a family, spend time talking with your guests.***
- ***Plan ways to get to know your children's friends and for your children to get to know your friends.***
- ***Model empathy and sensitivity with your child. Discuss why they are important interpersonal skills.***

Intentional About Friendship

You can help your child develop interpersonal competence by:

- **Creating a home where friends are always welcome.**
- **Giving your child friendship-making suggestions.**
- **Allowing your child to grieve when relationships turn sour or fade.**
- **Introducing your child to people of many different ages.**
- **Initiating conversations with your child about relationships.**

Become More Aware

Be sensitive to your child's temperament when it comes to interpersonal competence. An introverted child can have competence in this area even though he or she may have only one or two close friends.

time together

Three ways to nurture interpersonal competence in your child:

1. Build empathy in your child by modeling and talking about your emotions appropriately.
2. Go to a public place and guess what kind of mood people are in by the way they walk and look.
3. Welcome your child's friends into your home. Spend time talking with and getting to know them.

talk together

Questions to discuss with your child:

- Who do you like to talk to about your feelings? Why?
- Overall, how do you feel about the relationships in your life? Why?
- What's easiest for you: being empathetic, being sensitive, or making friends?

More Stuff You Can Use

LifeStories. This game encourages people to share stories about themselves and build interpersonal competence. Play it with friends, relatives, and neighbors. (Available from Animal Town, P.O. Box 485, Healdsburg, CA 95448; 1-800-445-8642.)

Final Word

"Parents can do much to help their children: learning how to recognize, manage, and harness their feelings; empathizing; and handling the feelings that arise in their relationships."

—Daniel Goleman, Ph.D., author of *Emotional Intelligence*

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