



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT™  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



## **DECEMBER** Asset of the Month: **FAMILY SUPPORT**

*Family provides high levels of love and support.*

This handout is designed to help adults throughout Silicon Valley develop materials and activities to promote the asset of **Family Support**. Developmental Assets®, created by Search Institute, are the positive values, relationships, skills, and experiences that help children and teens thrive.

### **The Importance of Family Support**

Family support refers to the ways that parents, siblings, and extended family show love, encouragement, and comfort for one another. Families are the cornerstone of the social support system for youth. The 2016 Search Institute Developmental Assets Survey, implemented by Project Cornerstone for Santa Clara County schools revealed that while younger youth generally experience and are aware of family support, teenagers experienced it less often: **88% of 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> graders reported family support, while only 74% of middle and high school students reported the asset.**

Because adolescents require greater autonomy and independence than younger children, effective family support for older youth takes a different form than in earlier years; however, their need for their families is still strong. Adults are challenged to find a balance between giving youth the support they need to navigate their adolescence and the independence they need to develop as individuals.

In their book *Parenting Teens with Love and Logic*, Foster Cline, M.D. and Jim Fay discuss the transition from parenting younger children, who typically require guidance and firm limits, to parenting adolescents, who benefit most from the freedom to make their own decisions within the boundaries of safe, reasonable limits. According to Cline and Fay, effective parenting in the teenage years requires clearly communicating expectations and consequences while allowing youth to make their own decisions and “own” the results, even if their choices are not the ones that we would have preferred.

The following discussion topics can be used to open a dialogue with young people about the ways that they experience family support:

- Does your family provide support in a way that is meaningful and easy for you to recognize? Why or why not?
- Do you and your parents treat each other with the same kindness and dignity that you would expect from your friends?
- Does your family do things together on a regular basis? Are there any activities that you would like to share (or be willing to share) with your family?

Remember, that while it may be challenging to remain connected to preteens and teenagers, the benefits of providing family support to older children are important and invaluable.

### **Activities**

The activities below offer a starting point to help build and strengthen the asset of family support.

#### *For families*

- Co-create family rules and boundaries. Agree on rewards and consequences for upholding or disregarding the rules and boundaries.
- Try to eat at least one meal together every day and set aside at least one evening or weekend day for the family to spend together in a pastime that everyone enjoys or finds valuable. Make the effort to maintain these traditions and rituals even if your children may be voicing

complaints about it.

- Be sure to recognize your children's unique talents and encourage their interests, even when they do not match yours. For example, if they are interested in animation, check to see if there is a convention or film festival in your region that you can attend together.
- Look your children in the eyes when you are speaking with them and give them all of your attention in conversation.
- Be empathetic about their struggles and concerns. No matter how silly or trivial their problems seem to you, these concerns are significant to your children.
- Praise your children for a job well done and point out when they are being helpful.
- At least once a day, try to express that you appreciate and care about your children.
- Be affectionate *and* respect their space. Older children especially may be uncomfortable about displays of affection in front of non-family members.

#### *For all adults*

- Talk with young people about their families and point out the ways that the children are supported and loved. Similarly, when you speak with parents, take time to notice and praise their efforts at providing family support for their children.
- If you are an employer, help your staff provide emotional support for their families through release time, sick leave, and creating a positive environment where employees do not feel that having children is a liability at their job.
- Sponsor activities and events in which the entire family can participate—for example, a picnic or carnival instead of a happy hour.

#### *In schools and youth programs*

- Deliver a unit on families to help young people appreciate and respect all kinds of families.
- Schedule events that bring families together, like open houses or family game nights.
- If possible, schedule speakers and workshops on family life and associated issues.
- Be sure that your staff recognize and acknowledge that a student's primary caregiver may not be their biological parents or students may be part of families with single parents, same gender parents, or other variations.

### **Resources**

- Project Cornerstone offers single-session workshops and a six-week *Take It Personally* (TIP) workshop series. These workshops are for caring adults and focus on ways that parents and all adults can be more effective and intentional in building assets in young people's lives. For information on these workshops, contact Project Cornerstone at [info@projectcornerstone.org](mailto:info@projectcornerstone.org).
- "Family camps" are a great way for families to spend time together in a relaxing outdoor environment. Check with your city, YMCA, or faith community to see when family camps are offered.
- Some good books about providing meaningful support to older children include *Parenting Preteens with a Purpose: Navigating the Middle Years* by Kate Thomsen, M.S., C.A.S.; *Why Do They Act That Way?* by David Walsh, Ph.D.; *How to Talk So Teens Will Listen & Listen So Teens Will Talk* by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish; and *Parenting at the Speed of Teens*, published by Search Institute.

### **About the Asset of the Month Toolkit**

The Asset of the Month toolkit is designed by YMCA of Silicon Valley Project Cornerstone using Search Institute's research-based Developmental Assets framework. The toolkit highlights 12 Developmental Assets and provides an editable poster (available in English and Spanish) and an overview handout for each asset. To access all 12 months of resources, go to <https://www.ymcasv.org/ymca-project-cornerstone/developmental-assets/asset-month-toolkit>

### **About Project Cornerstone**

Project Cornerstone is an initiative of the YMCA of Silicon Valley with a mission to ensure all youth feel valued, respected, and known so they grow into healthy, caring, and responsible adults. For more information, visit [www.projectcornerstone.org](http://www.projectcornerstone.org) or email us at [info@projectcornerstone.org](mailto:info@projectcornerstone.org).