



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT™  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



## **OCTOBER** Asset of the Month: **POSITIVE FAMILY COMMUNICATION**

*Young person and their parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parent(s).*

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

### **The Importance of Positive Family Communication**

Young people who experience positive family communication experience higher self-esteem, decreased substance use, less anxiety and depression, and greater school engagement. However, in the 2016 Search Institute Developmental Assets Survey, implemented by Project Cornerstone for Santa Clara County schools, only **65% of 4th-6th grade students and 37% of 7th-12th grade students** reported that they and their parents communicate positively and that they are willing to seek advice from their parents. To help promote this valuable asset, October is *Positive Family Communication* month in Silicon Valley.

For positive family communication to occur, all family members must be comfortable sharing their needs, wishes, and concerns in an honest and trusting environment without fear of rejection. Establishing positive communication when children are young may help keep the channel open in adolescence.

No matter how old your children are, it is never too late to start! The following questions can help your family. Encourage your child to answer these questions honestly:

- Who do you enjoy talking with, and why?
- What makes it easier to talk to family members, and what makes it more difficult?
- Which topics are easiest for you to talk about with your parents, and which are more difficult? Why?

The communication skills that young people develop in their families help set the pattern of how they will communicate for the rest of their lives. Teaching your children to communicate effectively with friends, teachers, co-workers, parents, peers, and others is a legacy that parents can give to their children.

### **Activities**

The activities below are a starting point to help adults find ways to show youth that they are valued and appreciated.

#### *For families*

- Create opportunities for unstructured communications. Sometimes the best conversations occur when you are side-by-side instead of face-to-face, such as when you are driving or working together in the kitchen.
- At dinnertime, instead of asking "How was your day?" play Worst/Best (or High/Low), where everyone, including parents, takes turns sharing one high point and one low point of their day.
- Hold regular family meetings to check in with each other and discuss family issues like holidays or chores. Make sure everyone has an opportunity to participate.

- Try having each parent set an “individual date” with each child where they spend time together away from home somewhere where they can talk, like a restaurant or coffee shop. This kind of one-to-one conversation makes it possible for a young person to discuss issues privately with their parent’s undivided attention.
- **Listen more than you talk.**
- Positive family communication is not just between parents and children. Siblings should also be encouraged and supported to communicate with each other openly and effectively.

#### *For all adults*

- Model positive, respectful communications at all times.
- Talk to young people about the importance of family communication.

#### *At school or in youth programs*

- Send home a list of “conversation starters” with information about the value of positive family communication. (See Resources at the end of this document for suggested books.)
- Assign homework that requires students to talk to (or interview) parents or other family adults.
- Create and deliver a unit on “family” which can help youth understand and appreciate diverse family structures.

### **Resources**

- The following books offer practical tips on creating and improving family communication:
  - *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*
  - *The Essential Guide to Talking with Teens*
  - *Conversations on the Go: Clever Questions to Keep Teens and Grown-Ups Talking*
- The Parent Further web site covers several topics related to positive family communication, including tips on how to talk about emotions, developing listening skills, and the impact (positive and negative) of digital technologies on communication. For more information, visit <http://www.parentfurther.com/parenting-matters/family-communication>.
- There are many books and stories that celebrate diverse family structures. Here are just a few: *The Family Book* by Todd Parr, *The Great Big Book of Families* by Mary Hoffman, and *One Family* by George Shannon.

### **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).