

# Helping Kids Succeed – Alaskan Style!

## Practical Suggestions for Building Assets in Your Child

### Asset # 2- Positive Family Communication

#### To Build Asset #2 Parents and Extended Family Can . . .

1. Answer all your children's questions honestly. Show you appreciate being asked-about anything. Make no topic "off-limits."  
- Valdez

2. Ask about their day... the teacher, the playground, the kid who sits behind them in art. How did they feel about the things that made up their day? - Seldovia

3. Set limits for how much TV is watched by everyone. Eat with and talk with your family instead of watching TV. When watching TV, look for opportunities to discuss what you see on TV and how it relates to real-life issues.  
- Yakutat

4. Ask your children what they think about things. Then, listen to what they say. If you comment on what they say, be respectful. - Barrow

5. Hold weekly family meetings. Let everyone speak openly but respectfully. Make sure the meetings include positive stuff like compliments, family fun plans, sharing dreams, or giving praise.  
- Wasilla

6. Think of the places that you know your child is comfortable talking with you - maybe the car or the steam or bedroom. Go to these places when you want to talk.  
- Kodiak

#### Traditional Ways to Promote Asset #2

Teach the dialect. Children may not be fluent, but need to have access to it. - Brevig Mission

Teach survival skills and sharing through hunting and camping. - Upper Kalskag

Praise your children from infancy through the teen years. - Shaktoolik

#### Simple Ways to Help Kids

*Three things that parents and extended family can do:*

1. Do a favorite activity with your child each week. Give one-on-one time to children.
2. Talk proudly about your children to friends, especially when they can hear you.
3. Do things in your home that include time for family conversation and sharing.

#### Reflection!

"Kind, loving words seldom go in one ear and out the other."

- Anonymous

### Asset #2 — Positive Family Communication

Parents and Youth communicate positively; youth is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents and extended family.

26% of youth surveyed by Search Institute have this asset in their lives.\*

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

#### What are Assets?

Assets are 40 key building blocks to help kids succeed. Like a dream catcher, assets are the supporting threads in a young

## Words of Encouragement

To often, when a problem arises with a youth's behavior, we are quick to blame the parent and/or the school. We may do this to rid ourselves of the responsibility we feel for the behavior of the youth. We may even do this to free ourselves from the guilt we feel for our own behavior. I heard one of my neighbors say, "It's ok for me to swear, lie, use drugs, and drive drunk, but those youth never should." We know the kids are watching us. We cannot expect anymore from them, than we expect from ourselves.

It is too simple to only blame others, when the research clearly shows that we all have a role to play in helping kids succeed. It has probably been this way since humans began forming communities. It will probably be this way until humans stop living in communities and neighborhoods.

What have you done for someone else's kid in the last week? What can you do for someone else's kid today?

### Quotes:

"The typical youth of today receives less than 10 minutes of positive family communication per day. How many minutes do you spend listening to, conversing with, telling stories to, and guiding your children? If you actually kept track of the amount of time, you may be surprised of how little time you spend with your children. Your kids need you; they need your time."

*CNN News (1996)*

## Research

Positive family communication has been linked to all kinds of healthy behaviors for youth. Research has shown that the more positive communication that exists in a family, the more likely the youth is to:

### **Avoid drugs and alcohol**

(Anderson & Henry, 1994; Bailey & Hubbard, 1990; Barnes, 1984; Barnes & Farrell, 1992; and others)

### **Have higher self-esteem, a better self concept, more self worth, and a greater degree of positive feelings and descriptions about self**

(Blyth & Traeger, 1988; Cauce, Felner & Primavera, 1982; Coates, 1985; Cotterell, 1992; Cotton & Savard, 1982; and others)

### **Have less anxiety and depression**

(Delaney, 1996; Eccles, Early, Fraser, Belansky, & McCarthy, 1997; Harter, Marold & Whitesell, 1992; Hartos & Power, 1997; and others)

### **A greater ability to resist peer pressure**

(Brook et al., 1993)

### **Tell fewer "lies" or falsehoods**

(Harter, Marold, Whitesell, & Cobbs, 1996)

### **Be less aggressive in conflict resolution**

(Kashani & Sheppard, 1990)

### **Have better interpersonal relationships**

(Kurdek & Fine, 1994; Mallinckrodt, 1992; McFarlane, Bellissimo, & Norman, 1995; and others)

Avoid delinquency and school misconduct

(Barnes & Farrell, 1992; Bogenschneider et al., 1997; Cochran & bo, 1989; Davey, 1993; and others)

### **Have more school engagement, greater achievement motivation, higher aspirations, better school attendance, spend more hours on homework, earn higher grades, and achieve higher standardized test scores**

(Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Bisnaire, Firestone, & Rynand, 1990; Cauce et al., 1982; Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Christenson, Rounds & Gorney, 1992; and others)

It is important to note that the studies suggest that there is an interplay among the support from various sources—parents, schools, neighborhoods, peers, extended family, and faith community. It can be said that parents need something positive to talk to their kids about.

These events, in today's world, typically come from a variety of sources. While the researchers have shown a link between positive communication and healthy youth, this comes as no surprise to us. Like the quote from *Helping Kids Succeed — Alaskan Style* reads, "The wisdom of the elders has withstood the research test of time."

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