

Helping Kids Succeed – Alaskan Style!

Practical Suggestions for Building Assets in Your Child

Asset # 39- Sense of Purpose

To Build Asset # 39 Parents and Extended Family Can . . .

Remind your children often that they were created for a reason and have a purpose to fulfill. — *North Pole*

Speak often of the future, and of the ways your children can brighten it. Have them share their own personal goals often. — *Wasilla*

Talk with your child about his or her career plans. Support your children's chosen direction in life, even if it isn't one you might have had in mind. If they chose it with care, it isn't up to parents to be bursting bubbles. — *Tenakee*

Give your children roles in family activities, celebrations, and major decisions. This shows them that they are important contributors to the family system. — *Elim*

Discuss current events with your children, and talk about ways we each can help solve the problems of the day. — *Fairbanks*

Do not meter out love based on a child's performance. Be firm, stern, but kind. Love your child no matter what. — *Wrangell*

Traditional Ways to Promote Asset # 39

The naming ceremony. Carrying on the name and the best traits of the person who died. This gives the child who has received the name a sense of identity because life goes on and the name is carried on.

— *Elim*

One Elder remembers having a purpose because he was raised by a blind grandfather. He helped his grandfather drag logs for miles to sell to teachers for fuel. He fished and sold logs to make money. He remembers having maktak on the beach when they took a whale. He remembers the caribou hunts and that they were plentiful. He remembers cutting grass that was put through the gills of the herring and he'd string them up on racks to dry. He always had important things to do, he was always needed, and he felt cared for and loved. — *Elim*

Asset # 39 — Sense of Purpose

Kids believe that their life has a purpose.

55% 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 person's life that can keep away harm and invite goodness.

Words of Encouragement

Youth reports that "my life has a purpose."

Jennifer Loesch

Does your life have a purpose? Do you feel that you've influenced or saved someone's life? Do you feel like you've lived every day to the absolute fullest? Or do you go through your days just waiting for bed-time to come and then your alarm goes off and you do it all over again?

I was raised in a very strong Christian home. In my life we believed that God has a purpose for our lives. The religious community I grew up in and my own home gave me a sense of purpose in life. That hasn't changed, I still feel like my purpose in life is to get up in the morning excited to be alive and to go to bed at night feeling like I accomplished something. It may be that I talked to a small child or perhaps I smiled at them. Maybe I turned in an inspirational paper to my English professor, or maybe I just called home and told my family that I love them. Whatever it may be, I figure that my purpose in life is to live my life to its fullest. I know that my life has a purpose.

I encourage you to get to know a student or teenager. Talk to them, listen to them, learn about their interests and goals in life. Learn what they do in their spare time. What are their hobbies? What is their favorite sport? Do they enjoy ice cream? During these exchanges you'll probably learn whether the youth feels that their life has purpose.

Think of a teenager that you know. Are they an active member of the school and community? Do they feel that their life has a purpose?

I sincerely hope that you can be a role model to a teenager. I hope that they can watch you and learn from you. I encourage you to spend time with a teenager, get to know them and learn about them. If they don't report that their life has a purpose, discuss why. Give suggestions as to what they might do to change that. What activities could they participate in that might give their life purpose?

What are you doing in the lives of teenagers in your community?

Research

A sense of purpose may be thought of as finding meaning in life or as the reason(s) an individual has for doing something. (Atkinson, 1987). Research shows that in adolescence, the individual makes the first of many important choices to pursue a particular purpose or purposes.

A sense of purpose has been associated with:

Improved parent-child relationships
(Grossman & Rowat, 1995; Saucier & Amber, 1982)

Increased self-esteem
(Nurmi & Pulliainen, 1991)

Decreased emotional or behavioral problems such as depression and sexual risk taking
(DuRant, Getts, Cadenhead, Emans, & Wood, 1995)

Decreased emotional distress
(Blum & Rinehart, 1997)

Reduced violence
(DuRant et al., 1994)

This newsletter and other asset resources are produced by the
Association of Alaska School Boards'
Alaska Initiative for Community Engagement (Alaska ICE)
316 West 11th Street
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Tel: (907) 586-1486
Fax: (907) 586-1450
Email: alaskaice@asab.org