

ideas for parents

Easy Ways to Build Assets for and with Your Child

FAST FACTS

**ASSET
CATEGORY**

**Social
Competencies**

The more personal skills your child has to interact with others and make decisions, the more likely he or she is to grow up healthy.

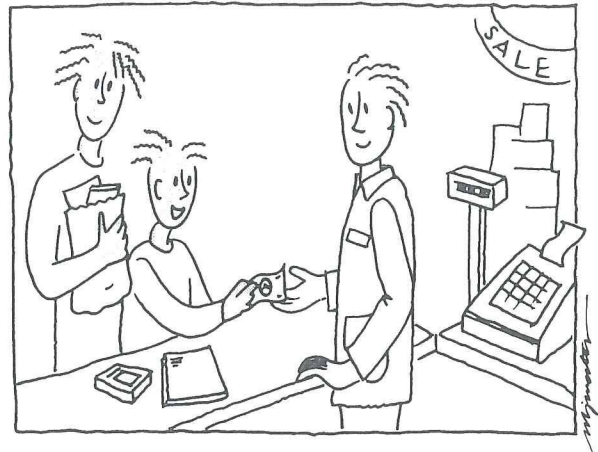
**Youth
Speak**

- "Just consider me a human being, not something that needs to be labeled."
- "Be a good role model."
- "Be the first one to smile or say hello."

The Importance of Social Competencies

Growing up is a lot like learning to play the piano. You need to learn some basic social competencies, and you need someone to teach you those skills. You need time to practice, guidance as you gain experience, and feedback along the way.

Social competencies are the skills and life perspectives children need to develop into healthy, competent adults. These skills come in handy on a daily basis, but they're even more crucial when your child hits the hang-ups and bang-ups of life. The more skills your child has, the more likely he or she will navigate through the maze of life.



The best way for parents to teach their children basic skills is by following these four steps:

1. Demonstrate the skill and let your child watch.
2. Do the skill together with your child.
3. Let your child do the skill alone while you watch.
4. Give feedback along the way.

These four steps may happen more quickly for skills that your child learns easily, but they may take years if you're trying to help your child develop assertiveness, planning, and decision-making skills. The important key is that you stick with your child along the way.

5 Key Social Competencies

Search Institute researchers have identified five assets in the area of social competence that are crucial for helping young people grow up healthy. Check the areas of strength in your child's life:

- Planning and decision making**—Your child knows how to plan ahead and make choices.
- Interpersonal competence**—Your child has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.
- Cultural competence**—Your child has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.
- Resistance skills**—Your child can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
- Peaceful conflict resolution**—Your child seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.

2 Keys to Teaching

1. **Let your child do things by herself or himself, even if it's not the way you'd do it.**
2. **Allow your child to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes.**

Read the next five *Ideas for Parents* newsletters for strategies for building specific social competencies in your child.

Social Competencies through the Years

Age Ways to Teach Social Competencies

- 0-1
 - Pay attention to how your baby communicates her or his likes and dislikes.
 - Affirm your baby as he or she learns new skills.
 - Don't rush your baby when he or she meets new people. Hold her or him and let your baby set the pace.
- 2-3
 - Allow your child to express all feelings, but give guidance on appropriate and inappropriate ways to act on feelings.
 - Give your child at least two equally appealing choices whenever you can.
 - When you play together, practice taking turns being first.
- 4-5
 - Teach your child the names for emotions.
 - Continue to cheer on your child's new skills, such as cutting, drawing, walking backward, and so on.
 - Start having family meetings where your child has a voice in decisions.
- 6-10
 - Encourage your child to develop more skills in an area he or she is interested in.
 - Help your child learn how much fun it can be to be part of a team.
 - Continue to emphasize using words—rather than actions—to articulate needs.
- 11-15
 - Encourage your child to see the connection between her or his actions today and what he or she will be able to do in the future.
 - Role model caring for yourself as an important step in caring for others.
 - Practice things to say in new social situations.
- 16-18
 - Be willing to "let go" a bit more, so your child can begin to make more decisions on her or his own.
 - Encourage your teenager to have conversations with peers who come from different ethnic backgrounds, and try to find at least one thing in common.
 - Help your child write a résumé.

Attitude Check

Learning new skills can often be frustrating and scary for your child. But by creating an open atmosphere about learning, you can encourage your child to develop those crucial skills for success. Instill these attitudes in yourself—and in your child.

- ✓ *Learning isn't always easy or simple.*
- ✓ *Embrace mistakes. They teach important lessons.*
- ✓ *Once you take the first step, the second step will be easier.*
- ✓ *Be gentle with yourself as you learn something new.*
- ✓ *Celebrate progress.*

More Help for Parents
Common Sense Parenting: A Proven Step-by-Step Guide for Raising Responsible Kids and Creating Happy Families by Raymond V. Burke et al. gives lots of practical advice on how to build a variety of social competencies. (Published by Boys Town Press.)

FINAL WORD

"Encouragement is teaching children the life skills they need to be successful in life and relationships."

—Jane Nelsen, Ed.D.

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