



# ideas for parents

Easy Ways to Build Assets for and with Your Child

## FAST FACTS

### ASSET #19: Religious Community

Youth are more likely to grow up healthy when they spend one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.

**63%**

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

### What Are Assets?

Assets are 40 values, experiences, and qualities that help kids succeed. "Religious community" is one of four constructive-use-of-time assets.

\* Based on Search Institute surveys of 217,277 6th- to 12th-grade youth throughout the United States during the 1999-2000 school year.

## What Congregations Offer

**A**lthough talking about religion can be very sensitive, especially in public schools, Search Institute researchers found that young people who are involved in a religious congregation are more likely to grow up healthy than kids who aren't involved.

Other research has uncovered similar findings. In fact, research suggests that religious institutions help young people develop in healthy ways in at least three areas:

**1** They reduce risky behaviors—Although young people who are involved in congregations can be found smoking, drinking, or engaging in other risky behaviors, researchers found that their levels of at-risk behavior are lower than among kids who aren't active in congregations.

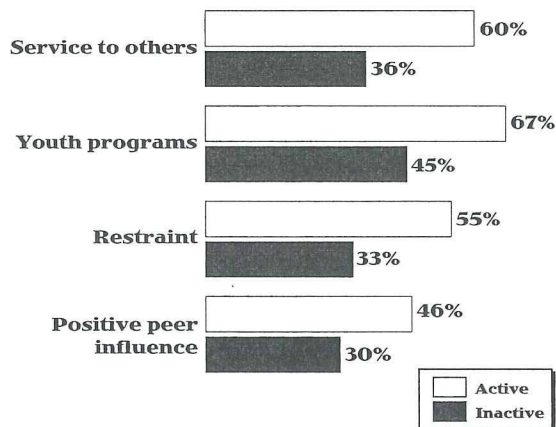
**2** They help build a values base—Religious institutions strongly emphasize positive values. That's why it's important to choose a congregation wisely. When you find a congregation that emphasizes what your family values, your kids are more likely to internalize these values and make responsible decisions.

**3** They expose young people to more people—Many community programs attract people of one age or one interest. A congregation attracts people of all ages with all kinds of interests and skills. Your child can meet other caring adults and young people who share similar values.



### Promoting Assets

Search Institute researchers compared kids who were active in congregations with kids who weren't active and found some big differences in the percentage of 6th- to 12th-grade youth who have these assets:



### time together

Three ways to encourage religious involvement:

- 1 With your child, visit various congregations. Include your child in decisions about how and where to be involved.
- 2 Work faith and spirituality into your daily life. Choose ways that best fit with your values, traditions, and culture.
- 3 Have a family meeting to talk about your family's religious involvement. What does each person like or not like?



## talk together

Questions to discuss with your child:

- How do you feel about our congregation (or that we don't attend a congregation)?
- How involved in religious activities are the kids you look up to? The kids you avoid?
- What was your most positive experience in a religious community? The most negative?

**Quick Tip:**  
 Become an active member in a congregation to promote the well-being of your child.

## Final Word

**"Most of the people I know who have what I want—which is to say, purpose, heart, balance, gratitude, joy—are people with a deep sense of spirituality."—Anne Lamott**

## Spirituality in the Family

**F**amily spirituality and religion. The Minnesota Family Strength Project asked parents of various cultural groups about these topics. Below are some of their comments.

- 1** "I don't think a family can be strong without being spiritual."  
—African American parent
- 2** "In my arts and crafts [making dream catchers], I think about spirituality, the ancestors...I feel that spirituality within myself. It makes me want to practice more of my culture so I can build strength." —American Indian parent
- 3** "When there is no religion, there is no family harmony. So religion is an important part of family harmony."  
—Somali parent
- 4** "Good morals, values, faith, go to church, living a good clean life keeps the family healthy." —Chicano/Latino parent

### More Help for Parents

**10 Principles for Spiritual Parenting: Nurturing Your Child's Soul** by MiMi Doe with Marsha Walch, Ph.D., contains exercises and practical suggestions to help express spirituality in the family. (Published by Harper Perennial.)