

ideas for parents

Easy Ways to Build Assets for and with Your Child

FAST FACTS

ASSET #18: Youth Programs

Youth are more likely to grow up healthy when they spend three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or school and/or community organizations.

58%

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. "Youth programs" 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.

E Is for Essential

It's appropriate that the word "extracurricular" starts with the letter **E**. But the word should be "essential-curricular" rather than "extracurricular." In fact, they're so important many schools are starting to call them "cocurricular" activities.

To many young people, youth programs at school and in the community are the highlight of their day. They meet new people who share their interests or introduce them to new ones. They spend time with adults who enjoy the activity. And they boost their skills.

But that's not all these activities do. They can help children channel aggressive behavior. In addition, researcher Laurence Steinberg, Ph.D., says extracurricular activities provide these benefits:

- Unique learning opportunities—Young people get to learn new skills that their academic courses rarely teach. Children get the chance to exercise their initiative and independence.
- Teamwork emphasis—A spirit of cooperation is encouraged, since most after-school programs are group activities.

Helpful Hints for Detecting Overload

Activities through youth programs are important, but kids can get too busy with them. These signs may indicate your child has activity burnout. Watch when your child:

- Has little time to relax, hang out, and have fun.
- Seems unhappy.
- Often complains about being tired or ill.
- Struggles to concentrate.
- Becomes more irritable.
- Wants to drop out of everything.



- Educational interests—Often, young people who aren't particularly interested in academics get turned on to a subject through an after-school activity.
- Connections to caring adults—People who supervise after-school activities develop important relationships with kids. Young people often turn to a coach or adviser if they have concerns or problems.
- Opportunities to meet new friends—After-school activities create another way for young people to meet new friends, to develop more relationships.

time together

Three ways to get your child involved in youth programs:

1. Ask your school or community center for a list of after-school activities. Discuss options with your child.
2. Consider helping your child start a new club (such as photography or skateboarding) if one of interest doesn't exist. Find out how to get (or be) an adviser.
3. Model having an "extracurricular activity" yourself. If they have time, parents should also have hobbies or activities that they do outside of a job and/or home.

talk together

Questions to discuss with your child:

- How do you feel about the number of youth programs you're currently involved in?
- How can we get a good sense of balance between youth programs, family time, and school?
- What do you enjoy about belonging to a club, organization, or sport?
- Which activities might you be interested in? How can we learn more about them?

Quick Tip:
Youth programs
can build as many
as 23 assets.



Final Word

"How adolescents spend their out-of-school time affects their success in school and their future."

—Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development

5 Keys to Youth Programs

"Extracurricular activities help children discover who they are and what they like to do," says author **Diana Townsend-Butterworth**. She gives these five tips for balancing school and other youth programs:

- 1** Be clear about your priorities. School comes first. Activities are second.
- 2** Find out more before your child jumps in. How much practice time is involved? Is your child a good match for this activity?
- 3** Examine activities on an ongoing basis. Do they fit with your family schedule? Are they meeting your child's needs?
- 4** Encourage activities that focus on fun or healthy competition, especially during the elementary and middle school years.
- 5** Help your child find a balance so that he or she isn't scheduled from morning to night.

More Help for Parents

Walking Your Talk: Building Assets in Organizations That Serve Youth by Neal Starkman. This book shows how youth organizations can use assets daily. (Published by Search Institute, www.search-institute.org; 800-888-7828.)