

ideas for parents

Easy Ways to Build Assets for and with Your Child

FAST FACTS

ASSET #12: School Boundaries

Youth are more likely to grow up healthy when school provides clear rules and consequences.

53%

*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. "School boundaries" is one of six boundaries-and-expectations assets.

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

Parents and Schools Setting Limits Together

The principal of Highline Community School in Colorado believes in assets. David Fischer walks his talk and acts as a role model for good behavior. He expanded the idea of the school's "bully-proofing" program so that it went from violence reduction to encompassing the idea that everyone is responsible for the health of the school. Students are now respected for their strengths and consulted for their input. The result is fewer violent incidents.

In this elementary school, when a student begins to bully other students, the other children don't let themselves be victimized. Instead, they challenge the bully. The bully finds her or his behavior doesn't work to bring the attention she or he is looking for.

Like the Highline school, all schools need boundaries. They need to set clear boundaries and expectations for how students should act and learn. Yet setting these standards isn't easy—and neither is enforcing them. Many schools struggle with how to discipline students in appropriate and effective ways.

As a parent you can help the process by working with your child's school. Encourage your school to create a conduct code at the beginning of the year, review the code with the students, and send a copy of it home to inform parents. Suggest that students help in



creating the code. For example, Streetwater High in National City, California, created "The Link Crew"—12th graders who explained the dos and don'ts of behavior to new students and talked with students with whom teachers were struggling. Grades and attendance improved, and fewer new students spent time in the principal's office.

When parents and educators work together, they can create a supportive environment for establishing and enforcing school boundaries. And the more families, schools, and communities work together to establish consistent boundaries, the better off our children will be because they will know what to expect.

Helpful Hints

Tips that make creating clear school boundaries easier:

- **Get involved in a parent-teacher policy organization.**
- **Focus on the positive and build on what's working.**
- **When conflicts occur, calmly state your concern and suggest solutions.**

Evaluate Your Child's School

Inform yourself about school boundaries by visiting or volunteering at your child's school and asking yourself these questions:

- *Overall, how are students behaving?*
- *How do adults and students interact with each other?*
- *When conflicts occur, how are they resolved?*
- *How do the school boundaries you observe match the boundaries you have at home?*

By the Book

If your child's school doesn't publish a student handbook, ask them to. You may want to offer to help put it together with input from your child and other students, as well as school staff. Some areas to cover include:



- Absences (excused/unexcused)
- Appearance (dress code/hair code)
- Bullying/threats
- Cheating/dishonesty
- Destruction of school property/vandalism
- Detention
- Discrimination
- Electronic devices (pagers, cell phones, personal stereos)
- Expulsion
- Fighting
- Gang activity/gang membership
- Homework
- Internet use
- Plagiarism
- Profanity/obscenity
- Sexual harassment
- Smoking/tobacco use
- Tardiness
- Weapons

Quick Tip:
Children learn better when school boundaries are clear and consistent.

talk together

Questions to discuss with your child:

- Do you understand your school's rules? Why or why not?
- Do you feel your school's consequences for violating rules are fair? Why or why not?
- How would you make school boundaries and consequences clearer?



More Help for Parents

A Parent's Guide to Innovative Education: Working with Teachers, Schools, and Your Children for Real Learning by Anne Wescott Dodd offers positive strategies to help parents and children bring out the best in their schools. (Published by The Noble Press.)

Final Word

"No greater challenge exists today than creating safe schools."

—Ronald D. Stephens

This newsletter and other asset resources are produced by Search Institute, www.search-institute.org; 800-888-7828.
Copyright © 1997, 2003 by Search Institute. Major support for Search Institute's *Healthy Communities* • *Healthy Youth* initiative is provided by Thrivent Financial for Lutherans Foundation.