



ideas for parents

Easy Ways to Build Assets for and with Your Child

EAST FACTS

ASSET #4: Caring Neighborhood

Youth are more likely to grow up healthy when they experience caring neighbors.

40%
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. "Caring neighborhood" is one of six support assets.

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

Neighborhood Friends

Ten-year-old Susan Kennedy considered 80-year-old Mr. Boggs one of her best friends. He was very fond of her, too, and he nicknamed her "Twirly Friend" because she liked to do "wheelies" on her bicycle in his driveway. Mr. Boggs taught Susan how to play checkers, and he once gave her a microscope.

When Mr. Boggs became gravely ill and needed to be hospitalized, Susan mailed him something every day. Sometimes it was a poem. Sometimes she wrote a letter. Other times she drew a picture and sent it to him. After a month, Mr. Boggs was able to go home. Mr. Boggs told Susan: "You saved my life. No one else called or wrote, and your mailings gave me the courage to live. Thank you."

Unlike Susan, many young people don't know their neighbors. They're scared of their neighbors, and many times, the neighbors are frightened by them. It's true, some neighborhoods are safer than others, but too many people don't reach out to each other—even in safe neighborhoods.

Friendships like the one between Susan and Mr. Boggs can only develop when people take risks by acknowledging their neighbors,



getting to know them, and taking the time to form relationships. Usually, everyone—no matter what their age—benefits.

How well do you and your children know your neighbors? Do you know their names? Find a safe way to begin getting to know your neighbors, such as National Night Out. But you don't have to wait; there are other things you can do. Organize a cookout or potluck. Greet your neighbors when you see them outside. Take one small step that will introduce your child to your neighbors and introduce you to the young people who live near you.

TALK Triggers

Your child may be unsure of what to talk about with a neighbor. Encourage your child to use these talk triggers to strike up a conversation:

- Do you have any hobbies?
- What do you like best about our neighborhood?
- What's your favorite book? Why?
- What troubles you most about the world today?
- What's your favorite childhood memory?
- What do you wish you had more time to do?

What Parents Say

"Communication is a VERY important element, not only among the whole family but also with neighbors, so when you need help they're happy to help."

—Chicano/Latino parent

"When better communication is required, the neighborhood Somali families help solve the problem if a problem is there." —Somali parent

6 Steps to Nurturing a Caring Neighborhood



1. Be honest about your hopes and fears about your neighborhood. Discuss these with your family—and some neighbors you trust.
2. Meet with a neighborhood group or slowly start a small group if one doesn't exist. Do activities together, such as creating a community garden.
3. Arrange a get-together so neighbors can meet and mingle.
4. Encourage your child to share with others, for instance, sleds, basketballs, books, or toys.
5. Spend time outdoors in your neighborhood where other neighbors are. Take walks or hang out on your front step.
6. Create a neighborhood welcome wagon of youth and adults.

Quick Tip:
Learn the names of your neighbors.

Be Proactive
To encourage neighbors to be more caring toward your children, tell a neighbor how much it means to you and your children when he or she acknowledges, smiles at, or greets your children.

talk together

Questions to discuss with your child:

- How often do you talk with our neighbors?
- Which neighbors are easiest to talk to? Why?
- How can we create comfortable and safe opportunities for you to get to know other neighbors?

More Help for Parents

Stopping at Every Lemonade Stand: How to Create a Culture That Cares for Kids by James R. Vollbracht. Chapter 4, "The Third Circle: The Neighborhood," contains stories and practical ideas for making the connections that lead to creating a caring neighborhood. (Published by Penguin Books.)

Final Word

"Love your neighbor as yourself."

—Southwestern Spanish proverb

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