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## YMCA Character Development Series

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# Developmental Assets Framework

*for Building Strong Kids, Strong Families & Strong Communities*

***(Birth to 12 Months)***  
***(Ages 13 to 35 Months)***  
***(Ages 3 to 5 Years)***  
***(Ages 6 to 11 Years)***  
***(Ages 12 to 18 Years)***

Search Institute has identified a framework of 40 developmental assets for infants (birth to 12 months) that blends Search Institute's research on developmental assets for 12- to 18-year-olds with research on healthy child development. For more information, see *What Young Children Need to Succeed* (Free Spirit, 2000). This page may be reproduced for educational, noncommercial purposes only. Copyright © 2000 by Search Institute, 700 S. Third St., Suite 210, Minneapolis, MN 55415; 800-888-7828; [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org).

## Background

YMCAs have a longstanding, fruitful relationship with Search Institute. Some YMCAs have been using the Search Institute Developmental Asset™ framework since its inception in the early 1990s. In fact, YMCAs' natural compatibility with Search Institute's work is so profound that a 1996 project to create program evaluation and improvement resources moved, by early 2000, to a more ambitious agenda.

The result was the Abundant Assets Alliance. It harnessed together YMCA of the USA, Y Canada, and Search Institute in ways that would link their expertise, networks, and influence to ensure that young people across North America have access to the Developmental Assets they need to grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.

This alliance and its compelling vision targeted three broad, long-term goals:

1. To support the transformation of YMCAs to be asset-rich resources;
2. To equip YMCAs to be catalysts and partners for community transformation; and
3. To join with other organizations across North America to influence social norms and policies.

## What is the Developmental Asset Framework?

The Developmental Assets Framework identifies 40 critical factors for young people's growth and development. When drawn together, these assets offer a set of benchmarks for positive child and adolescent development. The assets clearly show important roles that families, schools, congregations, neighborhoods, youth organizations and others in communities play in shaping young people's lives. They provide a powerful framework and lens for how YMCAs engage children, youth, families and communities.

### External assets

The first 20 developmental assets focus on positive experiences that young people receive from the people and institutions in their lives. Four categories of external assets are included in the framework:

- **Support** - Young people need to experience support, care and love from their families, neighbors and many others. They need organizations and institutions that provide positive, supportive environments.
- **Empowerment** - Young people need to be valued by their community and have opportunities to contribute to others. For this to occur, they must be safe and feel secure.
- **Boundaries and expectations** - Young people need to know what is expected of them and whether activities and behaviors are "in bounds" or "out of bounds."
- **Constructive use of time** - Young people need constructive, enriching opportunities for growth through creative activities, youth programs, congregational involvement and quality time at home.

### Internal assets

A community's or YMCA's responsibility for young people does not end with external assets. Each must make a similar commitment to nurturing the internal qualities that guide choices and create a sense of purpose and focus. The second 20 developmental assets fall into four additional categories

- **Commitment to learning** - Young people need to develop a lifelong commitment to education and learning.
- **Positive values** - Youth need to develop strong values that guide their choices.
- **Social competencies** - Young people need skills and competencies that equip them to make positive choices, to build relationships and to succeed in life.
- **Positive identity** - Young people need a strong sense of their own power, purpose, worth and promise

## How does this fit with YMCA Character Development

The Developmental Assets Framework is a perfect fit for YMCA Character Development around the values of Caring, Honesty, Respect, Responsibility and Faith. The Character Values provide a basic framework for engaging children, youth, teens and adults on positive values that are tied to the Christian Mission. The Developmental Asset Framework, also known as “Abundant Assets” builds on these values and incorporates them into a broader framework that truly helps the YMCA act on its motto of “**building strong kids, strong families and strong communities**”

## How to use these Abundant Asset Sheets as YMCA Staff

There are five Abundant Asset sheets in this document for five age groups of children, youth, and teens.

- *(Birth to 12 Months)*
- *(Ages 13 to 35 Months)*
- *(Ages 3 to 5 Years)*
- *(Ages 6 to 11 Years)*
- *(Ages 12 to 18 Years)*

The sheets are formatted in such a way that all 40 assets are listed on the front of the sheet. On the second page of each sheet is description of the Developmental Assets Framework as well as a brief paragraph on how to use the tool.

The ideas for this document is to be a master document for YMCA staff to have all of the sheets in one place. However, the practical use of these sheets is not to keep them all together in this master document, but to make individual front and back sheets for the five age categories. Each sheet would have the unique 40 assets for the specific age group on the front and the standard background of the Developmental Assets and the How to Use the sheet paragraph.

This information is invaluable to both staff and members. On a regular basis these sheets can be made available staff that serve in childcare, swimming, youth sports, teen sports, etc. This will help the YMCA keep their thinking clear and focus on “building strong kids” aspect of what we do.

These sheets also can be used on a regular basis by getting them in the hands of parents. This is a significant “value add proposition” that the Y provides for members. It makes our motto and mission real. It has been said that “knowledge is power”. In this case, “knowledge empowers”. We believe that these sheets in staff and parents’ hands will be a significant tool to help transform kids, families, communities and society at large.

*compiled and formatted by CSeibert  
Archived at  
USMissionNetworkResources.org  
WorldMissionNetworkResources.org*

**[The following two pages have an interesting interview with Dr. Peter Benson, President of Search Institute developer of the 40 Developmental Assets Framework]**

## **An interview with Peter Benson of Search Institute**

*Peter Benson, Ph.D., is president of Search Institute, an independent, not-for-profit organization that conducts research and evaluation, develops practical tools and provides training for organizations engaged in youth development.*

This interview is by Kristi Turnbaugh, of Discovery YMCA Magazine on the topic of nurturing today's youth.

### **What do you think is the biggest misperception of youth today?**

Peter Benson: The misperception is that we cast youth as problems to be managed as opposed to resources to be empowered. When young people are portrayed in the media, about 80 percent of the time it's about kids in trouble -- chemical use, violence, anti-social behavior, dropping out of school. And an awful lot of social science in the last 30 years has focused on counting problems with kids. ... As the public hears more and more that youth are problems, citizens disengage from kids and over depend on professionals and experts to (raise) kids.

When we can recast the language about kids to (talk about them as) developmental assets -- developmental strengths, youth as resources -- suddenly, it is easier for citizens to say, "I do have a capacity to nurture those strengths in young people."

### **What are some ways to "recast the language?"**

PB: First of all, instead of counting problems ... the scientists and federal policymakers who do studies (need) to count and to report to the public how well kids are doing through an asset-building lens. The developmental assets are a set of 40 universal building blocks that every kid needs to thrive, like caring neighborhoods, warm families, boundaries clearly expressed -- all the pretty obvious stuff, actually.

It is very powerful when communities report how we are doing in building these developmental strengths. It changes the imagination. When a community hears that only 26 percent of (its) young people have any neighbors who know their name, why is that an important thing for a city to know? Because, as people read that, they think, "Boy, I wonder whose role that is? Oops! There are kids in my neighborhood. What's my role?"

### **What are some barriers to creating healthier communities?**

PB: Community starts with a shared vision. In a lot of cities, ... people believe there is no longer a shared vision -- that we're all too complicated, there's too many subgroups -- so everything gets done by turf. I first crafted the asset language to try to build some threads across all the people of the city about things they hold in common, but they've forgotten they hold in common. That is, Ethiopian families, Hmong families, Anglo families -- they all want their kids to receive support, empowerment, boundaries, structured time use. And so the positive language, in a sense, helps the sense of our commonality. What is it we're all seeking together? And, boy, is that a great and important step in the reclaiming of a sense of need in communities rather than a sense of just me. This is about us.

### **How are schools getting on board?**

PB: We do experiments in schools to discover what percentage of kids had at least one adult relationship within a school building, where the kid is really known and cared about and felt cared about. What usually happens is (someone will) write the name of each young person in a school on an index card and tape all the cards of the hundreds and hundreds of kids around the perimeter of the gymnasium. Then they'll give all the adults teachers, bus drivers, coaches 10 gold stars. They're asked to put a gold star on the name of the kids with whom they have a relationship, which means they know something more about them than their name.

What they'll almost always discover is that about a quarter of the kids in a middle school will get an awful lot of gold stars, about a quarter will get some -- and 50 percent will get none. It's the adults who go through an emotional experience in the discovery: "My God! Who are these half? And why don't we connect to them?" Why do one-quarter of the kids get all the attention? Because they're easy to like, and they're kids who solicit support. What will happen is that the adults will begin to say, "We've got to figure out how to slow down and to purposely build ties with this (other) 50 percent." So it actually becomes a movement of passion rather than a program that a principal demands that teacher will do. If it came down that way, teachers could say, "The heck with that. I'm so busy. I don't have time to do that."

(What's important is) the personal discovery and knowing that we can't be a successful school if, in fact, half of our kids are disconnected from adults. It can't happen. So it's the teachers then who take charge and begin to help each other purposely design ways to reaching out to the forgotten half. It's really fabulous how that works.

**Did you follow up with these schools to check on their progress?**

PB: It's too soon to follow up, but the early stories we hear are that the emotional experiences of going through this are transforming. Teachers begin to demand (to the school board) the space and time to become a relational school. It just becomes so obvious. Sometimes social change is more about the heart than it is about the head.

**One of Search's recent studies is on "grading" grownups. It basically shows that adults know what they need to do to relate to kids, but they just don't do it. Did that surprise you?**

PB: No, it didn't surprise us at all. One reason that people don't act on their instincts about being asset builders in kids' lives is this: They've had it ground into them that the small things they ought to be doing with kids are too miniscule to matter -- because we couch everything as big issues like teen pregnancy, marijuana use, school dropouts. So when you frame the public image around big problems, small steps lose their magic. It is weaving those small molecules together.

The primary power system in the United States for raising healthy kids is active adult engagement, lots of adults -- a hundred million adults -- starting to show up differently in the kids' eyes. I'm not surprised by (the findings), but I'm hoping that we can show over the next five years, with the Y's help, that that gap closes. This is a big deal. You can't buy enough programs and professionals to do the raising of kids. It has got to be the natural work of the people in the communities.

*Interview from YMCA of the USA - [www.ymcaexchange.org](http://www.ymcaexchange.org)*



The YMCA is committed to ““**building strong kids, strong families and strong communities.**” The YMCA is also committed to nurturing and modeling the Character Values of **Caring, Honesty, Respect, Responsibility and Faith.** This resource sheet is intended to be a helpful tool for parents and for those who care for and influence children. This Developmental Assets list is explained in more detail on the back of this sheet. The more of these assets a child has in their lives the greater success in life, in relationships, and in society they will have.

### 40 Developmental Assets Infants Need to Succeed (Birth to 12 Months)

External Assets	Internal Assets
<p><b>Support</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Family support</b>—Family life provides high levels of love and support.</li> <li><b>Positive family communication</b>—Parents communicate with infants in positive ways. Parents respond immediately to infants and respect their needs.</li> <li><b>Other adult relationships</b>—Parents have support from three or more adults and ask for help when needed. Infants receive additional love and comfort from at least one adult other than their parents.</li> <li><b>Caring neighborhood</b>—Infants experience caring neighbors.</li> <li><b>Caring out-of-home climate</b>—Infants are in caring, encouraging environments outside the home.</li> <li><b>Parent involvement in out-of-home situations</b>—Parents are actively involved in communicating infants’ needs to caretakers and others in situations outside the home.</li> </ol> <p><b>Empowerment</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Community values children</b>—The family places infants at the center of family life. Other adults in the community value and appreciate infants.</li> <li><b>Children are given useful roles</b>—The family involves infants in family life.</li> <li><b>Service to others</b>—Parents serve others in the community.</li> <li><b>Safety</b>—Infants have safe environments at home, in out-of-home settings, and in the neighborhood. This includes childproofing these environments.</li> </ol> <p><b>Boundaries and Expectations</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Family boundaries</b>—Parents are aware of infants’ preferences and adapt the environment and schedule to suit infants’ needs. Parents begin setting limits as infants become mobile.</li> <li><b>Out-of-home boundaries</b>—Childcare settings and other out-of-home environments have clear rules and consequences for older infants and consistently provide all infants with appropriate stimulation and enough rest.</li> <li><b>Neighborhood boundaries</b>—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring and supervising infants’ behavior as they begin to play and interact outside the home.</li> <li><b>Adult role models</b>—Parents and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.</li> <li><b>Positive peer observation</b>—Infants observe siblings and other children interacting in positive ways. They have opportunities to interact with children of various ages.</li> <li><b>Appropriate expectations for growth</b>—Parents have realistic expectations for infants’ development at this age. Parents encourage development without pushing infants beyond their own pace.</li> </ol> <p><b>Constructive Use of Time</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Creative activities</b>—Parents expose infants to music, art, or other creative aspects of the environment each day.</li> <li><b>Out-of-home activities</b>—Parents expose infants to limited but stimulating situations outside the home. The family keeps infants’ needs in mind when attending events.</li> <li><b>Religious community</b>—The family regularly attends religious programs or services while keeping infants’ needs in mind.</li> <li><b>Positive, supervised time at home</b>—Parents supervise infants at all times and provide predictable, enjoyable routines at home.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Commitment to Learning</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Achievement expectation and motivation</b>—Family members are motivated to do well at work, at school, and in the community, and model their motivation for infants.</li> <li><b>Children are engaged in learning</b>—Parents and family members model responsive and attentive attitudes at work, at school, in the community, and at home.</li> <li><b>Stimulating activity</b>—Parents encourage infants to explore and provide stimulating toys that match infants’ emerging skills. Parents are sensitive to infants’ dispositions, preferences, and level of development.</li> <li><b>Enjoyment of learning</b>—Parents enjoy learning and model this through their own learning activities.</li> <li><b>Reading for pleasure</b>—Parents read to infants in enjoyable ways every day.</li> </ol> <p><b>Positive Values</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Family values caring</b>—Parents convey their beliefs about helping others by modeling their helping behaviors.</li> <li><b>Family values equality and social justice</b>—Parents place a high value on promoting social equality, religious tolerance, and reducing hunger and poverty while modeling these beliefs for infants.</li> <li><b>Family values integrity</b>—Parents act on their convictions, stand up for their beliefs, and communicate and model this in the family.</li> <li><b>Family values honesty</b>—Parents tell the truth and convey their belief in honesty through their actions.</li> <li><b>Family values responsibility</b>—Parents accept and take personal responsibility.</li> <li><b>Family values healthy lifestyle</b>—Parents love children, setting the foundation for infants to develop healthy attitudes and beliefs about relationships. Parents model, monitor, and teach the importance of good health habits, and provide good nutritional choices and adequate rest and playtime.</li> </ol> <p><b>Social Competencies</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Planning and decision making observation</b>—Parents make all safety and care decisions for infants and model safe behavior. As infants become more independently mobile, parents allow them to make simple choices.</li> <li><b>Interpersonal skills observation</b>—Parents model positive, constructive interactions with other people. Parents accept and are responsive to how infants express their feelings, seeing those expressions as cues to infants’ needs.</li> <li><b>Cultural observation</b>—Parents know and are comfortable with people of different cultural, racial, and/or ethnic backgrounds, and model this to infants.</li> <li><b>Resistance observation</b>—Parents model resistance skills through their own behavior.</li> <li><b>Peaceful conflict resolution observation</b>—Parents behave in acceptable, nonviolent ways and assist infants in developing these skills by helping them solve problems when they’re faced with challenging or frustrating circumstances.</li> </ol> <p><b>Positive Identity</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Family has personal power</b>—Parents feel they have control over things that happen in their own lives and model coping skills, demonstrating healthy ways to deal with frustrations and challenges. Parents respond to infants so infants begin to learn that they have influence over their immediate surroundings.</li> <li><b>Family models high self-esteem</b>—Parents create an environment where infants can develop positive self-esteem, giving infants appropriate, positive feedback and reinforcement about their skills and competencies.</li> <li><b>Family has a sense of purpose</b>—Parents report that their lives have purpose and demonstrate these beliefs through their behaviors. Infants are curious about the world around them.</li> <li><b>Family has a positive view of the future</b>—Parents are hopeful and positive about their personal future and work to provide a positive future for children.</li> </ol>

## What is the Developmental Asset Framework?

The Developmental Assets Framework identifies 40 critical factors for young people's growth and development. When drawn together, these assets offer a set of benchmarks for positive child and adolescent development. The assets clearly show important roles that families, schools, congregations, neighborhoods, youth organizations and others in communities play in shaping young people's lives. They provide a powerful framework and lens for how YMCAs engage children, youth, families and communities.

### External assets

The first 20 developmental assets focus on positive experiences that young people receive from the people and institutions in their lives. Four categories of external assets are included in the framework:

- **Support** - Young people need to experience support, care and love from their families, neighbors and many others. They need organizations and institutions that provide positive, supportive environments.
- **Empowerment** - Young people need to be valued by their community and have opportunities to contribute to others. For this to occur, they must be safe and feel secure.
- **Boundaries and expectations** - Young people need to know what is expected of them and whether activities and behaviors are "in bounds" or "out of bounds."
- **Constructive use of time** - Young people need constructive, enriching opportunities for growth through creative activities, youth programs, congregational involvement and quality time at home.

### Internal assets

A community's or YMCA's responsibility for young people does not end with external assets. Each must make a similar commitment to nurturing the internal qualities that guide choices and create a sense of purpose and focus. The second 20 developmental assets fall into four additional categories

- **Commitment to learning** - Young people need to develop a lifelong commitment to education and learning.
- **Positive values** - Youth need to develop strong values that guide their choices.
- **Social competencies** - Young people need skills and competencies that equip them to make positive choices, to build relationships and to succeed in life.
- **Positive identity** - Young people need a strong sense of their own power, purpose, worth and promise

## Using this tool

We encourage you to use this tool by looking over the asset list. The more a young person has these assets built into their life the better success and meaning they will find in life. Remember "**training up a child**" is a process. You may find items on this list that are not true of your child's experience at this point. This is not a crisis. It has been found that even getting a handful of these assets in place "paves the way" for positive development and the greater possibility of other assets being added in the future. This sheet's main goal is to provide helpful information so that parents and those who impact children can use this knowledge to be proactive in building assets into the lives of children, thus building better families and a better society for today and tomorrow.

\* Search Institute has identified a framework of 40 developmental assets for infants (birth to 12 months) that blends Search Institute's research on developmental assets for 12- to 18-year-olds with research on healthy child development. For more information, see *What Young Children Need to Succeed* (Free Spirit, 2000). This page may be reproduced for educational, noncommercial purposes only. Copyright © 2000 by Search Institute, 700 S. Third St., Suite 210, Minneapolis, MN 55415; 800-888-7828; [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org).



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**40 Developmental Assets Toddlers Need to Succeed (Ages 13 to 35 Months)**

External Assets	Internal Assets
<p><b>Support</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Family support</b>—Family life provides high levels of love and support.</li> <li><b>Positive family communication</b>—Parents communicate with toddlers in positive ways. Parents respond to toddlers in a reasonable amount of time and respect their needs.</li> <li><b>Other adult relationships</b>—Parents have support from three or more adults and ask for help when needed. Toddlers receive additional love and comfort from at least one adult other than their parents.</li> <li><b>Caring neighborhood</b>—Toddlers experience caring neighbors.</li> <li><b>Caring out-of-home climate</b>—Toddlers are in caring, encouraging environments outside the home.</li> <li><b>Parent involvement in out-of-home situations</b>—Parents are actively involved in helping toddlers succeed in situations outside the home. Parents communicate toddlers’ needs to caretakers outside the home.</li> </ol> <p><b>Empowerment</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Community values children</b>—The family places toddlers at the center of family life and recognizes the need to set limits for toddlers. Other adults in the community value and appreciate toddlers.</li> <li><b>Children are given useful roles</b>—The family involves toddlers in family life.</li> <li><b>Service to others</b>—Parents serve others in the community.</li> <li><b>Safety</b>—Toddlers have safe environments at home, in out-of-home settings, and in the neighborhood. This includes childproofing these environments.</li> </ol> <p><b>Boundaries and Expectations</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Family boundaries</b>—Parents are aware of toddlers’ preferences and adapt the environment to suit toddlers’ needs. Parents set age-appropriate limits for toddlers.</li> <li><b>Out-of-home boundaries</b>—Childcare settings and other out-of-home environments have clear rules and consequences to protect toddlers while consistently providing appropriate stimulation and enough rest.</li> <li><b>Neighborhood boundaries</b>—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring and supervising toddlers’ behavior as they begin to play and interact outside the home.</li> <li><b>Adult role models</b>—Parents and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.</li> <li><b>Positive peer observation</b>—Toddlers observe siblings and other children interacting in positive ways. They have opportunities to interact with children of various ages.</li> <li><b>Appropriate expectations for growth</b>—Parents have realistic expectations for toddlers’ development at this age. Parents encourage development without pushing toddlers beyond their own pace.</li> </ol> <p><b>Constructive Use of Time</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Creative activities</b>—Parents expose toddlers to music, art, or other creative age-appropriate activities each day.</li> <li><b>Out-of-home activities</b>—Parents expose toddlers to limited but stimulating situations outside the home. The family keeps toddlers’ needs in mind when attending events.</li> <li><b>Religious community</b>—The family regularly attends religious programs or services while keeping toddlers’ needs in mind.</li> <li><b>Positive, supervised time at home</b>—Parents supervise toddlers at all times and provide predictable, enjoyable routines at home.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Commitment to Learning</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Achievement expectation and motivation</b>—Family members are motivated to do well at work, at school, and in the community, and model their motivation for toddlers.</li> <li><b>Children are engaged in learning</b>—Parents and family members model responsive and attentive attitudes at work, at school, in the community, and at home.</li> <li><b>Stimulating activity</b>—Parents encourage toddlers to explore and provide stimulating toys that match toddlers’ emerging skills. Parents are sensitive to toddlers’ dispositions, preferences, and level of development.</li> <li><b>Enjoyment of learning</b>—Parents enjoy learning and express this through their own learning activities.</li> <li><b>Reading for pleasure</b>—Parents read to toddlers every day and find ways for toddlers to participate in enjoyable reading experiences.</li> </ol> <p><b>Positive Values</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Family values caring</b>—Parents convey their beliefs about helping others by modeling their helping behaviors.</li> <li><b>Family values equality and social justice</b>—Parents place a high value on promoting social equality, religious tolerance, and reducing hunger and poverty while modeling these beliefs for toddlers.</li> <li><b>Family values integrity</b>—Parents act on their convictions, stand up for their beliefs, and communicate and model this in the family.</li> <li><b>Family values honesty</b>—Parents tell the truth and convey their belief in honesty through their actions.</li> <li><b>Family values responsibility</b>—Parents accept and take personal responsibility.</li> <li><b>Family values healthy lifestyle</b>—Parents love children, setting the foundation for toddlers to develop healthy attitudes and beliefs about relationships. 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Parents aren’t overwhelmed by toddlers’ needs and demonstrate appropriate resistance skills.</li> <li><b>Peaceful conflict resolution observation</b>—Parents behave in acceptable, nonviolent ways and assist toddlers in developing these skills by helping them solve problems when they’re faced with challenging or frustrating circumstances.</li> </ol> <p><b>Positive Identity</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Family has personal power</b>—Parents feel they have control over things that happen in their own lives and model coping skills, demonstrating healthy ways to deal with frustrations and challenges. Parents respond to toddlers so toddlers begin to learn that they have influence over their immediate surroundings.</li> <li><b>Family models high self-esteem</b>—Parents create an environment where toddlers can develop positive self-esteem, giving toddlers appropriate, positive feedback and reinforcement about their skills and competencies.</li> <li><b>Family has a sense of purpose</b>—Parents report that their lives have purpose and model these beliefs through their behaviors. Toddlers are curious and explore the world around them.</li> <li><b>Family has a positive view of the future</b>—Parents are hopeful and positive about their personal future and work to provide a positive future for children.</li> </ol>

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\* Search Institute has identified a framework of 40 developmental assets for toddlers (13 to 35 months) that blends Search Institute's research on developmental assets for 12- to 18-year-olds with research on healthy child development. For more information, see *What Young Children Need to Succeed* (Free Spirit, 2000). This page may be reproduced for educational, noncommercial purposes only. Copyright © 2000 by Search Institute, 700 S. Third St., Suite 210, Minneapolis, MN 55415; 800-888-7828; [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org).



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## 40 Developmental Assets Preschoolers Need to Succeed (Ages 3 to 5 Years)

External Assets	Internal Assets
<p><b>Support</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Family support</b>—Family life provides high levels of love and support.</li> <li><b>Positive family communication</b>—Parents and preschoolers communicate positively. Preschoolers seek out parents for help with difficult tasks or situations.</li> <li><b>Other adult relationships</b>—Preschoolers have support from at least one adult other than their parents. Their parents have support from people outside the home.</li> <li><b>Caring neighborhood</b>—Preschoolers experience caring neighbors.</li> <li><b>Caring out-of-home climate</b>—Preschoolers are in caring, encouraging environments outside the home.</li> <li><b>Parent involvement in out-of-home situations</b>—Parents are actively involved in helping preschoolers succeed in situations outside the home. Parents communicate preschoolers’ needs to caretakers outside the home.</li> </ol> <p><b>Empowerment</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Community values children</b>—Parents and other adults in the community value and appreciate preschoolers.</li> <li><b>Children are given useful roles</b>—Parents and other adults create ways preschoolers can help out and gradually include preschoolers in age-appropriate tasks.</li> <li><b>Service to others</b>—The family serves others in the community together.</li> <li><b>Safety</b>—Preschoolers have safe environments at home, in out-of-home settings, and in the neighborhood. This includes childproofing these environments.</li> </ol> <p><b>Boundaries and Expectations</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Family boundaries</b>—The family has clear rules and consequences. The family monitors preschoolers and consistently demonstrates appropriate behavior through modeling and limit setting.</li> <li><b>Out-of-home boundaries</b>—Childcare settings and other out-of-home environments have clear rules and consequences to protect preschoolers while consistently providing appropriate stimulation and enough rest.</li> <li><b>Neighborhood boundaries</b>—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring and supervising preschoolers’ behavior as they begin to play and interact outside the home.</li> <li><b>Adult role models</b>—Parents and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.</li> <li><b>Positive peer interactions</b>—Preschoolers are encouraged to play and interact with other children in safe, well-supervised settings.</li> <li><b>Appropriate expectations for growth</b>—Adults have realistic expectations for preschoolers’ development at this age. Parents, caregivers, and other adults encourage preschoolers to achieve and develop their unique talents.</li> </ol> <p><b>Constructive Use of Time</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Creative activities</b>—Preschoolers participate in music, art, dramatic play, or other creative activities each day.</li> <li><b>Out-of-home activities</b>—Preschoolers interact in stimulating ways with children outside the family. The family keeps preschoolers’ needs in mind when attending events.</li> <li><b>Religious community</b>—The family regularly attends religious programs or services while keeping preschoolers’ needs in mind.</li> <li><b>Positive, supervised time at home</b>—Preschoolers are supervised by an adult at all times. Preschoolers spend most evenings and weekends at home with their parents in predictable, enjoyable routines.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Commitment to Learning</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Achievement expectation and motivation</b>—Parents and other adults convey and reinforce expectations to do well at work, at school, in the community, and within the family.</li> <li><b>Children are engaged in learning</b>—Parents and family members model responsive and attentive attitudes at work, at school, in the community, and at home.</li> <li><b>Stimulating activity</b>—Parents encourage preschoolers to explore and provide stimulating toys that match preschoolers’ emerging skills. Parents are sensitive to preschoolers’ dispositions, preferences, and level of development.</li> <li><b>Enjoyment of learning</b>—Parents and other adults enjoy learning and engage preschoolers in learning activities.</li> <li><b>Reading for pleasure</b>—Adults read to preschoolers for at least 30 minutes over the course of a day, encouraging preschoolers to participate.</li> </ol> <p><b>Positive Values</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Family values caring</b>—Preschoolers are encouraged to express sympathy for someone who is distressed and begin to develop a variety of helping behaviors.</li> <li><b>Family values equality and social justice</b>—Parents place a high value on promoting social equality, religious tolerance, and reducing hunger and poverty while modeling these beliefs for preschoolers.</li> <li><b>Family values integrity</b>—Parents act on their convictions, stand up for their beliefs, and communicate and model this in the family.</li> <li><b>Family values honesty</b>—Preschoolers learn the difference between telling the truth and lying.</li> <li><b>Family values responsibility</b>—Preschoolers learn that their actions affect other people.</li> <li><b>Family values healthy lifestyle</b>—Parents and other adults model, monitor, and teach the importance of good health habits. Preschoolers begin to learn healthy sexual attitudes and beliefs as well as respect for others.</li> </ol> <p><b>Social Competencies</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Planning and decision making practice</b>—Preschoolers begin to make simple choices, solve simple problems, and develop simple plans at age-appropriate levels.</li> <li><b>Interpersonal interactions</b>—Preschoolers play and interact with other children and adults. They freely express their feelings and learn to put these feelings into words. Parents and other adults model and teach empathy.</li> <li><b>Cultural interactions</b>—Preschoolers are exposed in positive ways to information about and to people of different cultural, racial, and/or ethnic backgrounds.</li> <li><b>Resistance practice</b>—Preschoolers are taught to resist participating in inappropriate or dangerous behavior.</li> <li><b>Peaceful conflict resolution practice</b>—Parents and other adults model positive ways to resolve conflicts. Preschoolers are taught and begin to practice nonviolent, acceptable ways to deal with challenging and frustrating situations.</li> </ol> <p><b>Positive Identity</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Family has personal power</b>—Parents feel they have control over things that happen in their own lives and model coping skills, demonstrating healthy ways to deal with frustrations and challenges. Parents respond to preschoolers so preschoolers begin to learn that they have influence over their immediate surroundings.</li> <li><b>Family models high self-esteem</b>—Parents create an environment where preschoolers can develop positive self-esteem, giving preschoolers appropriate, positive feedback and reinforcement about their skills and competencies.</li> <li><b>Family has a sense of purpose</b>—Parents report that their lives have purpose and model these beliefs through their behaviors. Preschoolers are curious and explore the world around them.</li> <li><b>Family has a positive view of the future</b>—Parents are hopeful and positive about their personal future and work to provide a positive future for children.</li> </ol>

## What is the Developmental Asset Framework?

The Developmental Assets Framework identifies 40 critical factors for young people's growth and development. When drawn together, these assets offer a set of benchmarks for positive child and adolescent development. The assets clearly show important roles that families, schools, congregations, neighborhoods, youth organizations and others in communities play in shaping young people's lives. They provide a powerful framework and lens for how YMCAs engage children, youth, families and communities.

### External assets

The first 20 developmental assets focus on positive experiences that young people receive from the people and institutions in their lives. Four categories of external assets are included in the framework:

- **Support** - Young people need to experience support, care and love from their families, neighbors and many others. They need organizations and institutions that provide positive, supportive environments.
- **Empowerment** - Young people need to be valued by their community and have opportunities to contribute to others. For this to occur, they must be safe and feel secure.
- **Boundaries and expectations** - Young people need to know what is expected of them and whether activities and behaviors are "in bounds" or "out of bounds."
- **Constructive use of time** - Young people need constructive, enriching opportunities for growth through creative activities, youth programs, congregational involvement and quality time at home.

### Internal assets

A community's or YMCA's responsibility for young people does not end with external assets. Each must make a similar commitment to nurturing the internal qualities that guide choices and create a sense of purpose and focus. The second 20 developmental assets fall into four additional categories

- **Commitment to learning** - Young people need to develop a lifelong commitment to education and learning.
- **Positive values** - Youth need to develop strong values that guide their choices.
- **Social competencies** - Young people need skills and competencies that equip them to make positive choices, to build relationships and to succeed in life.
- **Positive identity** - Young people need a strong sense of their own power, purpose, worth and promise

## Using this tool

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## YMCA Character Development Series

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### 40 Developmental Assets Elementary-School Children Need to Succeed (Ages 6 to 11 Years)

External Assets	Internal Assets
<p><b>Support</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Family support</b>—Family life provides high levels of love and support.</li> <li>2. <b>Positive family communication</b>—Parents and children communicate positively. Children are willing to seek advice and counsel from their parents.</li> <li>3. <b>Other adult relationships</b>—Children have support from adults other than their parents.</li> <li>4. <b>Caring neighborhood</b>—Children experience caring neighbors.</li> <li>5. <b>Caring out-of-home climate</b>—School and other activities provide caring, encouraging environments for children.</li> <li>6. <b>Parent involvement in out-of-home situations</b>—Parents are actively involved in helping children succeed in school and in other situations outside the home.</li> </ol> <p><b>Empowerment</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. <b>Community values children</b>—Children feel that the family and community value and appreciate children.</li> <li>8. <b>Children are given useful roles</b>—Children are included in age-appropriate family tasks and decisions and are given useful roles at home and in the community.</li> <li>9. <b>Service to others</b>—Children serve others in the community with their family or in other settings.</li> <li>10. <b>Safety</b>—Children are safe at home, at school, and in the neighborhood.</li> </ol> <p><b>Boundaries and Expectations</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. <b>Family boundaries</b>—The family has clear rules and consequences and monitors children’s activities and whereabouts.</li> <li>12. <b>Out-of-home boundaries</b>—Schools and other out-of-home environments provide clear rules and consequences.</li> <li>13. <b>Neighborhood boundaries</b>—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring children’s behavior.</li> <li>14. <b>Adult role models</b>—Parents and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.</li> <li>15. <b>Positive peer interaction and influence</b>—Children interact with other children who model responsible behavior and have opportunities to play and interact in safe, well-supervised settings.</li> <li>16. <b>Appropriate expectations for growth</b>—Adults have realistic expectations for children’s development at this age. Parents, caregivers, and other adults encourage children to achieve and develop their unique talents.</li> </ol> <p><b>Constructive Use of Time</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17. <b>Creative activities</b>—Children participate in music, art, drama, or other creative activities for at least three hours a week at home and elsewhere.</li> <li>18. <b>Out-of-home activities</b>—Children spend one hour or more each week in extracurricular school activities or structured community programs.</li> <li>19. <b>Religious community</b>—The family attends religious programs or services for at least one hour per week.</li> <li>20. <b>Positive, supervised time at home</b>—Children spend most evenings and weekends at home with their parents in predictable, enjoyable routines.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Commitment to Learning</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>21. <b>Achievement expectation and motivation</b>—Children are motivated to do well in school and other activities.</li> <li>22. <b>Children are engaged in learning</b>—Children are responsive, attentive, and actively engaged in learning.</li> <li>23. <b>Stimulating activity and homework</b>—Parents and teachers encourage children to explore and engage in stimulating activities. Children do homework when it’s assigned.</li> <li>24. <b>Enjoyment of learning and bonding to school</b>—Children enjoy learning and care about their school.</li> <li>25. <b>Reading for pleasure</b>—Children and an adult read together for at least 30 minutes a day. Children also enjoy reading or looking at books or magazines on their own.</li> </ol> <p><b>Positive Values</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>26. <b>Caring</b>—Children are encouraged to help other people.</li> <li>27. <b>Equality and social justice</b>—Children begin to show interest in making the community a better place.</li> <li>28. <b>Integrity</b>—Children begin to act on their convictions and stand up for their beliefs.</li> <li>29. <b>Honesty</b>—Children begin to value honesty and act accordingly.</li> <li>30. <b>Responsibility</b>—Children begin to accept and take personal responsibility for age appropriate tasks.</li> <li>31. <b>Healthy lifestyle and sexual attitudes</b>—Children begin to value good health habits and learn healthy sexual attitudes and beliefs as well as respect for others.</li> </ol> <p><b>Social Competencies</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>32. <b>Planning and decision making</b>—Children begin to learn how to plan ahead and make choices at appropriate developmental levels.</li> <li>33. <b>Interpersonal skills</b>—Children interact with adults and children and can make friends. Children express and articulate feelings in appropriate ways and empathize with others.</li> <li>34. <b>Cultural competence</b>—Children know about and are comfortable with people of different cultural, racial, and/or ethnic backgrounds.</li> <li>35. <b>Resistance skills</b>—Children start developing the ability to resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.</li> <li>36. <b>Peaceful conflict resolution</b>—Children try to resolve conflicts nonviolently.</li> </ol> <p><b>Positive Identity</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>37. <b>Personal power</b>—Children begin to feel they have control over things that happen to them. They begin to manage frustrations and challenges in ways that have positive results for themselves and others.</li> <li>38. <b>Self-esteem</b>—Children report having high self-esteem.</li> <li>39. <b>Sense of purpose</b>—Children report that their lives have purpose and actively engage their skills.</li> <li>40. <b>Positive view of personal future</b>—Children are hopeful and positive about their personal future.</li> </ol>

## What is the Developmental Asset Framework?

The Developmental Assets Framework identifies 40 critical factors for young people's growth and development. When drawn together, these assets offer a set of benchmarks for positive child and adolescent development. The assets clearly show important roles that families, schools, congregations, neighborhoods, youth organizations and others in communities play in shaping young people's lives. They provide a powerful framework and lens for how YMCAs engage children, youth, families and communities.

### External assets

The first 20 developmental assets focus on positive experiences that young people receive from the people and institutions in their lives. Four categories of external assets are included in the framework:

- **Support** - Young people need to experience support, care and love from their families, neighbors and many others. They need organizations and institutions that provide positive, supportive environments.
- **Empowerment** - Young people need to be valued by their community and have opportunities to contribute to others. For this to occur, they must be safe and feel secure.
- **Boundaries and expectations** - Young people need to know what is expected of them and whether activities and behaviors are "in bounds" or "out of bounds."
- **Constructive use of time** - Young people need constructive, enriching opportunities for growth through creative activities, youth programs, congregational involvement and quality time at home.

### Internal assets

A community's or YMCA's responsibility for young people does not end with external assets. Each must make a similar commitment to nurturing the internal qualities that guide choices and create a sense of purpose and focus. The second 20 developmental assets fall into four additional categories

- **Commitment to learning** - Young people need to develop a lifelong commitment to education and learning.
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## 40 Developmental Assets Middle and High-School Youth Need to Succeed (Ages 12 to 18 Years)

External Assets	Internal Assets
<p><b>Support</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Family support</b>—Family life provides high levels of love and support.</li> <li>2. <b>Positive family communication</b>—Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.</li> <li>3. <b>Other adult relationships</b>—Young person receives support from three or more non parent adults.</li> <li>4. <b>Caring neighborhood</b>—Young person experiences caring neighbors.</li> <li>5. <b>Caring school climate</b>—School provides a caring, encouraging environment.</li> <li>6. <b>Parent involvement in schooling</b>—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.</li> </ol> <p><b>Empowerment</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. <b>Community values youth</b>—Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.</li> <li>8. <b>Youth as resources</b>—Young people are given useful roles in the community.</li> <li>9. <b>Service to others</b>—Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.</li> <li>10. <b>Safety</b>—Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.</li> </ol> <p><b>Boundaries and Expectations</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. <b>Family boundaries</b>—Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.</li> <li>12. <b>School boundaries</b>—School provides clear rules and consequences.</li> <li>13. <b>13.Neighborhood boundaries</b>—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.</li> <li>14. <b>14.Adult role models</b>—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.</li> <li>15. <b>15. Positive peer influence</b>—Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.</li> <li>16. <b>16.High expectations</b>—Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.</li> </ol> <p><b>Constructive Use of Time</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17. <b>Creative activities</b>—Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.</li> <li>18. <b>18.Youth programs</b>—Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community.</li> <li>19. <b>Religious community</b>—Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.</li> <li>20. <b>Time at home</b>—Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Commitment to Learning</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>21. <b>21.Achievement motivation</b>—Young person is motivated to do well in school.</li> <li>22. <b>22. School engagement</b>—Young person is actively engaged in learning.</li> <li>23. <b>23.Homework</b>—Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.</li> <li>24. <b>24. Bonding to school</b>—Young person cares about her or his school.</li> <li>25. <b>25. Reading for pleasure</b>—Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.</li> </ol> <p><b>Positive Values</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>26. <b>26. Caring</b>—Young person places high value on helping other people.</li> <li>27. <b>27. Equality and social justice</b>—Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.</li> <li>28. <b>28. Integrity</b>—Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.</li> <li>29. <b>29.Honesty</b>—Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy."</li> <li>30. <b>30. Responsibility</b>—Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.</li> <li>31. <b>31. Restraint</b>—Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.</li> </ol> <p><b>Social Competencies</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>32. <b>32. Planning and decision making</b>—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.</li> <li>33. <b>33. Interpersonal competence</b>—Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.</li> <li>34. <b>34. Cultural competence</b>—Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.</li> <li>35. <b>35. Resistance skills</b>—Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.</li> <li>36. <b>36. Peaceful conflict resolution</b>—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.</li> </ol> <p><b>Positive Identity</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>37. <b>37. Personal power</b>—Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."</li> <li>38. <b>38. Self-esteem</b>—Young person reports having a high self-esteem.</li> <li>39. <b>39. Sense of purpose</b>—Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."</li> <li>40. <b>40. Positive view of personal future</b>—Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.</li> </ol>

## What is the Developmental Asset Framework?

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- **Boundaries and expectations** - Young people need to know what is expected of them and whether activities and behaviors are "in bounds" or "out of bounds."
- **Constructive use of time** - Young people need constructive, enriching opportunities for growth through creative activities, youth programs, congregational involvement and quality time at home.

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- **Commitment to learning** - Young people need to develop a lifelong commitment to education and learning.
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