HEALTHY COMMUNITIES HEALTHY YOUTH

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ideas for parents

Easy Ways to Build Assets for and with Your Child

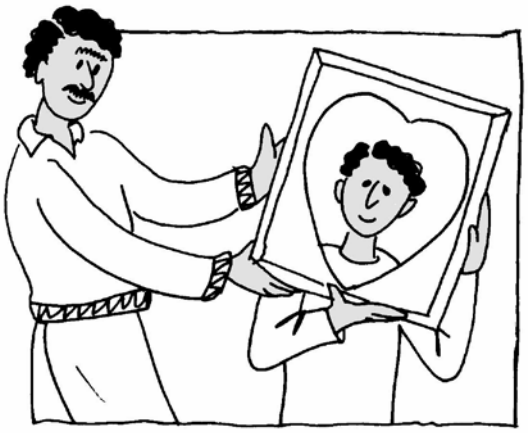
The Power of a Positive Identity

Our identities are always in a state of flux. Depending on what's currently happening in your life, you may feel confident or unsure, optimistic about the future or pessimistic, that you have some control or little control. These ups and downs are normal for you and they're normal for your child. It's also normal for your child's identity to vary from situation to situation. For example, your child may have a much more positive sense of her or his athletic "self" than social "self" (or vice versa).

What's important, however, is what a person's identity is like most of the time. People who have a strong sense of self still maintain that sense even when difficulties arise. They continue to be hopeful, optimistic, and believe they can make a difference, even when circumstances seem to be trying to persuade them otherwise.

What do you think of the identity your child is forming? Is this someone you like? Is this someone who surprises you at times? Is this someone who, overall, has a sense of purpose, power, worth, and promise?

While identity is partially determined by genetics, you still have a lot of influence on bringing out the best in your child. The way



you interact with your child helps your child feel loved or unloved. The ways you respond to your child's successes, mistakes, actions, and words also build either a sense of positive or negative identity.

The positive-identity assets tie in closely with the support assets. A child who feels loved, supported, and nurtured is more apt to feel good about her- or himself. Children whose home, school, neighborhood, and community see the best in them are more apt to bring out the best in themselves. The choice is ours. Love children, and children will learn to love themselves.

Quick Tip:
Develop your child's identity with love and support.

4 Key Areas of Positive Identity

Search Institute researchers have identified four positive-identity assets that are crucial for helping young people grow up healthy. Check the areas of strength in your child's life:

- ❑ ***Personal power—Your child feels he or she has control over things that happen to her or him.***
- ❑ ***Self-esteem—Your child reports having a high self-esteem.***
- ❑ ***Sense of purpose—Your child reports that her or his life has a purpose.***
- ❑ ***Positive view of personal future—Your child is optimistic about her or his personal future.***

Look to future newsletters for details on all four positive-identity assets!

FAST FACTS

ASSET CATEGORY

Positive Identity

The more a child has a sense of power, purpose, worth, and promise, the more likely he or she is to grow up healthy.

Youth Speak

- *"Remind me that I'm worthwhile."*
- *"Encourage me to give tough things my best shot."*
- *"Understand that I hope things will go well for me in the future."*

Positive Identity through the Years

Age	Ways to Encourage Positive Identity Formation
0-1	· Love, respect, and accept children unconditionally. · Delight in each child's unique personality. · Create positive interactions. Play together in ways that make infants laugh and enjoy the time together.
2-3	· Focus on the behavior; do not blame children when correcting their inappropriate behaviors. · When children say phrases such as "Me do it," let them. · Create an atmosphere that is loving, supportive, and affirming so that children enjoy and feel good about their environment.
4-5	· Encourage children to take pride in their cultural heritage. · Break new tasks into small, manageable steps that children can master without becoming too frustrated. · Use only positive and encouraging phrases around children. For example, say "Let's try it" instead of "That won't work" or "That looks hard."
6-10	· Respect the decisions children make. · Focus on your child's strengths and encourage her or him in these areas. · Encourage children to seek out answers and solutions when they face obstacles or difficult times.
11-15	· Encourage your child to explore and experiment within her or his areas of interest and ability. · Expect your child to experience ups and downs of self-esteem during these years, and for it to increase as he or she gets older. · Avoid comparing your child with others.
16-18	· Continue to support your teenager as he or she struggles with issues and questions of identity. · Show your teenager the positive possibilities in her or his future. · Delight in your teenager's talents, capabilities, and discoveries. Share your delight.

Helpful Hints

Tips that make developing a positive identity in your child easier:

- ***Think of yourself as a mirror. What are you reflecting back to your child in terms of her or his self-image?***
- ***Examine your own identity. What needs support? What's strong?***
- ***Encourage your children to be themselves while guiding and supporting them.***
- ***Focus on the positive. Look for the best in your child.***

A Worthwhile Question

Have each family member answer this question: What makes you feel worthwhile?

More Help for Parents

Feeling Great: Teaching Children to Excel at Living by Terry Orlick. This book emphasizes children's total development and has more than 100 fun-filled activities to do as a family. (Published by Creative Bound Inc.)

Final Word

"The optimal way to value your child: Discover your child's assets and strengths and spend time encouraging and emphasizing them."

—Kevin Leman, psychologist

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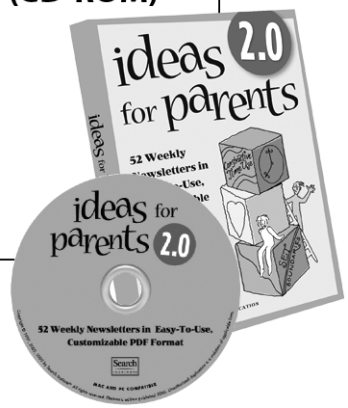
Ideas for Parents newsletters (CD-ROM)

52 customizable, weekly newsletters communicate the positive messages of asset-building to parents and caregivers. Topics include homework help, school spirit, and parent self-care.

Available online at **mvparentstore.search-institute.org.**