

ideas for parents

Easy Ways to Build Assets for and with Your Child

FAST FACTS

ASSET #39: Sense of Purpose

Youth are more likely to grow up healthy when they report that their lives have purpose.

59%

*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. "Sense of purpose" is one of four positive-identity assets.

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

Finding the Meaning of Life

"The unexamined life is not worth living," said Socrates. And with the wild schedules and frantic pace we live today, it's easy not to take the time to find out what really matters.

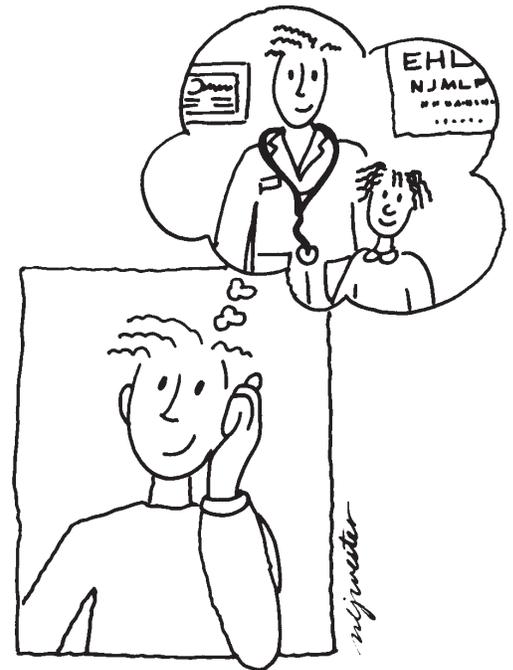
Yet for young people to have a sense of purpose in life, they need to look within. What gives their life meaning? What gets them excited to wake up in the morning? What dreams do they have for the future?

Each person—including your child—gets approximately 170 hours a week to choose what to do with her or his time. Which subjects is your child taking in school? Are they meaningful—or easy? What extracurricular activities does your child do? Are they giving your child purpose—or are they just something to pass the time? What about your family time? Is it meaningful interaction time, or is everybody so tired that you'd prefer just to veg out together in front of the television?

The difference between young people who have a sense of purpose in life and those who don't boils down to one thing: They take charge of their lives. If they don't know what gives them meaning or purpose, they set out to find ways to contribute to the greater good. If they know what gives them purpose, they are out there doing it—every day.

As a family, you can encourage that journey by giving family members time to reflect, discuss, and try new things of interest. Together you can find purpose as a family and as individuals.

Quick Tip:
Tell your child what gives your life purpose.



time together

Three ways to help your child find a sense of purpose:

1. Identify how your child would like to contribute to the family and to others in the community. Then help her or him get started.
2. Network with other adults and young people who have similar interests. See if you can participate in some meaningful activities together.
3. Remind your child often that he or she was created for a reason and has a special purpose to fulfill.

Words to Ponder

“You may have a success in life, but then just think—what kind of life was it?” said Joseph Campbell, scholar and professor of mythology. “What good was it—you’ve never done the thing you wanted to do in all your life. I always tell my students, go where your body and soul want to go. When you have the feeling, then stay with it, and don’t let anyone throw you off.”

Joseph Campbell called this sense of purpose “bliss,” and advocated that people take time to identify what their bliss is. “Follow your bliss, and don’t be afraid, and doors will open where you didn’t know they were going to be,” he said. What bliss are you following? What about your child?

talk together

Questions to discuss with your child:

- *What dreams do you have for your future? For the family’s future? For our community’s future?*
- *Which mentors or role models who have a strong purpose in life do you admire? Why?*
- *If you could do only one thing with your life, what would it be? Why?*

Helpful Hints

Tips that help your child find a sense of purpose:

- ***Cut down on television, computer, and telephone time to give your child time to develop her or his own interests.***
- ***Model having a sense of purpose. Do the things that matter to you. Contribute to the family and to the community.***
- ***Compare passion lists. Have family members each write down five things they’re passionate about and then talk about them.***

More Help for Parents

Kids Who Make a Difference by Gary Chandler and Kevin Graham. This book shows young people who took up environmental causes and had success. (Published by Twenty-First Century Books.)

Final Word

“To live means to have . . . a mission to fulfill—and in the measure in which we avoid setting our life to something, we make it empty.”

—José Ortega y Gasset, philosopher

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Healthy Communities Healthy Youth, Old Saybrook is part of the Search Institute's national Healthy Communities Healthy Youth network.

Our local initiative has opportunities for anyone interested in joining our effort to increase the number of developmental assets for ALL Old Saybrook youth.

For more information contact HCHY Coordinator Wendy Mill at Youth and Family Services, 860-510-5050 or via email at wmill@town.old-saybrook.ct.us.