

THE AMERICAN Family Assets STUDY

Building Family Assets at Home: IDEAS FOR ALL FAMILY MEMBERS

FAMILY ASSETS ARE THE EVERYDAY THINGS FAMILIES DO TO BE STRONG, EVEN IN CHALLENGING TIMES. THEY ARE THE ACTIONS WE TAKE TO BUILD HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS AND HEALTHY FAMILY MEMBERS. WHETHER YOU ARE A CHILD, TEEN, OR PARENTING ADULT, EVERYONE IN THE FAMILY PLAYS A ROLE IN BUILDING THESE ASSETS. HERE ARE SOME IDEAS FOR HOW YOU CAN BUILD ASSETS AT HOME.

NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS

Families are stronger when family members have healthy relationships with one another. People in healthy relationships communicate openly, show affection, and support each other.

- **Show family members that you care in little ways.** Find a new, small but visible thing you can do to show others in your family that you care. Even a note on the bathroom mirror can brighten someone's day.
- **Keep the focus on the relationships.** Sometimes others in your family will do things you don't like or that stress you out or make you unhappy, and you may have to confront the problem. At the same time, make it a priority to maintain your relationship, even in the midst of the challenges.
- **Talk about the everyday stuff EVERY day.** Don't wait for "important" conversations to have good conversations with others in your family. Find times to talk together every day. Ask questions like, "What was the best question you asked today?" or "What were the high and low points of your day?"

For information on the research behind the family assets, visit www.search-institute.org/familyassets

For practical ways to build assets in your family, visit www.ParentFurther.com/familyassets

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- **Ask other family members about the things they really enjoy, or their Sparks.** They might be music, cooking, acting, or being a good friend. Ask them to teach you about their sparks. Show them that their sparks matter to you because they matter to them.

ESTABLISHING ROUTINES

Families are stronger when they share meals, traditions, and activities together, and when family members know they can depend on each other.

- **Make family meals a priority.** Figure out how often you eat together and what makes meals enjoyable for everyone and then make a plan for your family meals. Be creative! Take turns picking out the menu, try new recipes, or set a theme for the meal conversation like “favorite movies that include food”. If you can’t eat dinner together, try breakfast or lunch.
- **Plan regular family fun nights.** Brainstorm the kinds of things you like to do together and that fit your budget. Some families go out to dinner together. Others play board games at home. Some may take a walk or a hike. Find something that works (and is fun) for your family.
- **Be intentional about maintaining meaningful traditions in your family.** These may include how you celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, and milestones in life. For some families, these may include religious or spiritual traditions such as worship, prayer, sacred readings, or music. Whatever the specific tradition, tell stories about its importance, history, and meaning—both across generations and for each member of your family.
- **Let others in your family know what they can count on you to do,** then make it a priority to do it. Keep track of those commitments on a calendar or to-do list. If you are unable to follow through (things happen), apologize and look for ways you can regain the confidence and trust of your family members.

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- **Keep a shared family calendar** that includes everyone's commitments and daily schedules, including school, work, and activities as well as chores, family times, and other events. Each week, review the coming days together so everyone knows what's coming.

MAINTAINING EXPECTATIONS

Families are stronger when they have clear expectations for each other, including talking about tough issues, setting fair rules and boundaries, and expecting everyone to contribute to family life.

- **Use the news to bring up tough topics.** It can be hard to bring up a difficult issue with your parent or with your teen. Sometimes a story in the local or national news can help get those conversations started. Ask others in your family what they thought about a story you read or how they would respond in those situations.
- **Think through tough conversations.** Sometimes you need to have a difficult conversation. Think it through in advance. *What questions do you need to ask? What questions will the other person ask of me? What can you do to make it go well? When would be a good time that everyone involved would be able to focus?*
- **Be proactive in setting expectations together.** Sometimes we avoid setting expectations and addressing tough topics because they can be uncomfortable. So we wait until there's a problem, which is often the most difficult time to bring up a topic or set new expectations. It's much more effective to be proactive, bringing up issues long before they become a problem or a big deal.
- **Establish expectations that meet the four Cs**—Clear, Consistent, Completion, Compassionate:

Clear: Set expectations that are explicit, concrete, and understood. Reinforce them by writing them down or asking others to say what they understand the expectation to be. Discuss the “why” behind the expectation to increase understanding and buy-in.

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- Consistent:* Be fair in how expectations are set, monitored, and enforced. For example, if teens are not allowed to text during meals, adults should not text during meals either.
- Completion:* Focus on the goal more than the process in determining whether expectations are met. (For example, a goal may be to have a clean living room. It's less important whether the dusting or vacuuming is done first.) That gives some freedom in how things get done, focusing instead on ensuring that the expectations are met.
- Compassionate:* Remember to keep your relationship as a high priority and recognize that no one is perfect.

- **Recognize that everyone contributes to making your family strong.** It's not just the parent or parents who make a family strong and build its assets. Each person plays a role in whether your family functions well, whether everyone feels comfortable at home, how tasks get shared, and whether it's enjoyable to spend time together. Talking through what each person wants to contribute (and is able to contribute) is a good starting point. Then monitor to be sure that what needs to happen does happen—and adjust as needed.

ADAPTING TO CHALLENGES

Families are stronger when they balance everyday commitments, make decisions and solve problems together, and adjust when necessary.

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- **Be aware of each other's competing responsibilities.** Sometimes a parent has a particularly challenging time at work that affects family time. Sometimes a teen has to rebalance her or his schedule to participate in a school play or to finish midterm exams. Sometimes a grandparent needs extra attention as he or she recovers from surgery. Regularly talk together as a family about what's happening, what might need to be adjusted, and where each person needs a little extra support.
- **Solve problems together.** When issues come up, see them as opportunities to work together to find creative solutions. Before jumping to a decision, brainstorm potential solutions and encourage everyone in the family to think of out-of-the-box ideas. The more creative the process, the more likely you'll come up with a solution that works for everyone.
- **Prepare for inevitable changes in life.** Change is inevitable. Some is expected; some isn't. Talk together about what's happening or what you expect. Gather information to help you prepare. If, for example, you're moving to a new city or neighborhood, visit or gather information in advance so your teen can start to learn about the new location.
- **Do things together and with others.** In times of transition and stress, it can be easy to withdraw and become more isolated. One of the best ways to stay connected and supported during times of change is to do enjoyable things together as a family. Talk together, laugh together, show affection, walk together, play together, and encourage each other. In addition, be sure to spend time with other people who are important to you and who provide you with the support and encouragement you need.
- **Remember what's most important to your family.** When faced with challenges and change, take time as a family to remember what's most important to you. For most families, it's their relationship with each other and the values that they share. Recognize the ways that your relationships, values, and priorities keep you grounded and strong through the challenges.

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CONNECTING TO COMMUNITY

Families are stronger when they feel like they have deep connections to their friends and neighbors, and when they have access to activities and resources to enrich their lives. Here are some ways you can build these assets in your family.

- **Talk together about who in your neighborhood or community matters to your family.** Who are the friends, neighbors, extended family members, friends, teachers, or coaches that you would turn to for support, encouragement, or help? Who looks out for your family? Who would you call or e-mail if you had exciting or difficult news to share? Then think about how you might strengthen ties with those people.
- **Map out the places in your community where you feel “at home.”** Is there a school? A place of worship? A coffee shop or restaurant? A barber or hairdresser? A friend’s home? A park? A bowling alley? A library? A mall? A youth organization or community center? Talk as a family about those places and what makes them important to you. If you have trouble identifying places, think together about where there might be places you might enjoy spending time together.
- **Make a plan to build new connections.** Many families don’t have a lot of places they can turn to that are safe and welcoming. If you’re in that situation, talk with people you trust about where they spend time and where they get support—they may invite you to join them. Plan to visit a new place in your community once a week or once a month. See if you discover a new resource for your family.
- **Give back to people and places that matter to you.** Thank family friends for being there for you. Send a note of appreciation (and maybe even a financial contribution) to organizations that have made you feel welcome. As a family, volunteer to help in programs and organizations together. Not only will you give back to a place that matters, but you’ll also benefit from spending time together serving others.

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