
Q AND A

During or after your presentation you may be asked questions about developmental assets. Here are some Q's (questions) that have been commonly asked along with the A's (answers) we suggest. Try not to read from the page, but do give accurate information. If you're stuck for an answer, don't be reluctant to say so. You can consult one of the resources from the "Additional Resources" section of this kit, go to Search Institute's Web site (www.search-institute.org), or call Search Institute (800-888-7828) for further information.

Some general tips for responding to questions:

- No matter what you think of the question, acknowledge both the question and the person asking it.
- You may want to repeat the question in your own words to make sure that you're hearing it correctly.
- Answer the question as well as you can, and don't be afraid to say, "I don't know, but I'll try to find out for you."

Q:

"Who came up with the concept of assets?"

A:

The concept of assets was developed by Search Institute's former president, the late Peter L. Benson. Since 1989, Search Institute has been conducting research—grounded in the vast literature on resilience, prevention, and adolescent development—that has illuminated the positive relationships, opportunities, competencies, values, and self-perceptions that young people need to succeed. The original 30-asset framework was published in 1990 in a book called *The Troubled Journey: A Portrait of 6th-12th Grade Youth* (a joint publication of Search Institute and Lutheran Brotherhood). Based on surveys of 47,000 young people, this report showed the power of those 30 assets in their lives. Subsequent research, including focus groups with professionals to deepen understanding of how the developmental assets are experienced by urban youth, youth living in poverty, and youth of color, led to a revision of the framework to its current 40-asset structure. The assets are measured using the *Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors* survey, a 156-item self-report survey that is administered to 6th through 12th graders in public and private schools. The figures in this binder represent sur-

vey data gathered in 2010 from surveys in public and private schools of 89,000 students.

Q:

“I see the name of Lutheran Brotherhood all over Search Institute’s materials. What’s the connection there? Does Search Institute have a religious agenda?”

A:

Search Institute is a nonprofit 501(c) 3, nonsectarian organization.

Lutheran Brotherhood, now Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, was the founding national sponsor for Search Institute’s Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth initiative. Search Institute received significant grants and contracts from Lutheran Brotherhood, which provided major corporate support for the institute’s Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth initiative. Search Institute has also received significant grants and contracts from a wide range of organizations, including the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation, the DeWitt Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Lilly Endowment, Blandin Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, Cargill Corporation, and Norwest Banks.

“Religious Community” is included as part of the “Constructive Use of Time” assets because research has shown that congregations of many faiths provide young people with positive, safe, intergenerational environments in which to gather—whether for spiritual growth or simply to engage in activities without any specific religious content with other young people bound together by shared values.

Many faith communities and congregations have found the asset framework to be consistent with their faith’s core values and find it useful in organizing and galvanizing their efforts to provide young people with what they need to succeed and grow to be healthy, responsible adults. For more on how a variety of faith traditions connect with the developmental assets, see Eugene Roehlkepartain’s *Building Assets in Congregations*, published by Search Institute.

Q:

“Is there any proof that this model works? None of the data from the surveys seem to show any cause-and-effect relationships.”

A:

Search Institute is currently conducting longitudinal studies that, over time, will shed light on the cause-effect relationship between developmental assets and behavioral outcomes.

Currently we know that in every community where the survey has been administered, the same patterns emerge—the more assets young people report, the less they report involvement in high-risk behavior and the more they report positive (thriving) outcomes.

Although it’s too early in the process for Search Institute to have publications based on its own longitudinal studies, a number of other longitudinal studies are

cited in the book *Developmental Assets* that are suggestive of causal relationships among the reported levels of particular assets and positive outcomes for adolescents.

Q:

“Isn’t there a conflict between developmental assets and other models, like the risk factor/protective factor, resilience, and positive youth development models?”

A:

The developmental assets approach incorporates many of the principles of the risk factor/protective factor models, as well as research on resilience and positive youth development.

The developmental assets framework emphasizes (1) building young people’s strengths as the key to life successes, and (2) building healthy relationships and environments rather than providing specific programs. To the extent that other strength-based approaches use these strategies, they complement the asset framework.

There is no either-or choice between promoting assets and reducing risks. The best strategy is to do both. And there continues to be a need for intervention and treatment programs that provide specialized help for youth who are already experiencing difficulties.

Q:

“This is all nice theory, but where’s the program? What do we do?”

A:

While there is no single, specific “asset-building program,” asset building is already occurring regularly in communities. These efforts, however, need to be intentional, consistent, broader, deeper, more frequent, and done by more adults and with all young people.

Too often people have relied on programs to provide them with a ready-made solution. The developmental assets framework emphasizes relationships and environment, enhancing already existing programs.

Many existing programs and practices can be revamped to incorporate the building of developmental assets.

A number of Search Institute materials give guidelines for “what to do.” See the “Additional Resources” section of this kit for more information.

Q:

“This is just more stuff for teachers to do instead of teaching academics.”

A:

You likely are already doing much of what you need to do to build students’ developmental assets. The approach really asks you to think differently about what,

why, and how you're teaching rather than to do things that take away from academics.

Research has shown that higher levels of developmental assets are strongly related to students' doing well in school. The more assets students report having, the more they attend school, the more engaged and motivated they are, and the better grades they get.

Q:

"How does this relate to communities of color?"

A:

Different assets may be especially important for different groups of young people, depending on the outcome we're talking about. But research has shown that, regardless of race or ethnicity or where and in what circumstances young people live, the more assets young people have, the better off they are—whether in reducing risk-taking behavior or improving positive behavior such as succeeding in school.

Some communities—including communities of different cultural backgrounds but also urban-rural, East Coast–West Coast, industrial-technological and so on—have found that certain assets are more significant for their young people than are other assets. Other communities, though excited to find a model of youth development that is not a deficit-based approach to working with young people, have found that other assets not yet documented by Search Institute are particularly significant for their young people. And still other communities have found that they can integrate and interpret the assets in ways that are consistent with their cultures, as is illustrated in the book *Helping Kids Succeed—Alaskan Style*. A resource that focuses on cultural competence and the relationship of cultural heritage to the assets is the 2000 report *The Spirit of Culture*, created by the Assets for Colorado Youth (ACY) initiative, that was based in Denver.

The Developmental Assets framework is just that, a conceptual framework, and its usefulness can be attributed to the soundness and breadth of the research on which it is based, as well as the flexibility with which it can be applied and modified for particular communities and circumstances. *The Spirit of Culture*, for example, tells the story of staff at the Denver Indian Center wanting to use the assets, and how they worked together with diverse tribal groups to restate some of the assets to work better with Indian values of self-respect and respect for others, as well as to reflect the ways in which Native American spirituality is incorporated into daily life.

Q:

"This is another of these social experiments that we see every couple of years. What do we have to do to keep this out of our schools so our kids can learn?"

A:

Far from being an "experiment," building assets is already in our schools and com-

munities, and it always has been, because it's more about establishing positive relationships and environment than anything else.

We're influencing young people whether we think about it or not. Using a Developmental Assets approach simply means being more intentional and systematic about building young people's strengths.

The 40 Developmental Assets were not identified simply on a handful of Search Institute studies. Rather, more than 800 studies conducted by other researchers over the past decade support the inclusion of at least these 40 factors as key elements in helping our young people thrive.

Q:

"This seems to focus only on kids who are already doing pretty well and ignores kids at risk. Is it right to turn our backs on kids who need us most?"

A:

Building Developmental Assets is not a substitute for addressing areas of special need. Search Institute's research strongly suggests, however, that building Developmental Assets may be one important prevention strategy. One problem with focusing on risks to young people is the danger of overlooking their strengths and potential; building assets with young people who indeed are at risk can help them tremendously.

All young people can benefit from more assets in their lives and from more adults establishing positive relationships with them.

Q:

"Which assets are most important? Why not just focus on those?"

A:

That's like asking which single nutrient or food group the body most needs, rather than working to ensure a balanced diet. Trying to isolate one asset or group of assets as more important than another diverts attention from the hard work at hand—that of rallying whole communities to accept the challenge (and the joy) of building assets. It's definitely more complicated, often messier, and sometimes inconvenient, to be sure—but helping young people acquire as many assets as possible is the way we need to go. The true power of assets comes as they're added together.

Q:

"I'm getting a big so-what from all this. You're telling me that caring for young people and treating them with respect will help them? That's supposed to be insightful?"

A:

One of the strengths of the Developmental Assets framework is its commonsense approach.

Most people want to be cared about and treated with respect. And most people know that caring for young people and treating *them* with respect will help them,

but far fewer intentionally do that. The fact that most young people report experiencing fewer than half the Developmental Assets—as well as survey reports from adults who don't act on their own beliefs—indicates that, common sense or not, many young people *aren't* being cared for and treated with respect.

The Developmental Assets framework provides a common language to help people in all walks of life be intentional about asset building—including such actions as showing care and respect for young people.

Q:

“I’ve looked over this list of 40 assets and I can definitely see some others that belong on there. Where’s ‘sense of humor’? Where’s ‘punctuality’? Where’s ‘respect’?”

A:

The original framework (1990) consisted of 30 Developmental Assets.

The current framework of 40 Developmental Assets was created in 1996 based on Search Institute’s review of the literature on prevention, risk and resilience, and positive youth development, and on conversations with those who work directly with young people.

Search Institute doesn’t intend to give the impression that these 40 Developmental Assets are the only factors that are important for healthy development. But each of the assets grows out of a body of scientific literature that shows its positive impact in young people’s lives.

As Search Institute continues to expand its knowledge and understanding of what promotes the healthy development of young people, it’s likely that the framework of Developmental Assets will be revised accordingly. For example, Search Institute is currently undertaking research into extending the asset framework from its original focus on 12- to 18-year-olds to the whole span from birth to age 20. It’s likely that new knowledge from that research could guide refinement or updating of the framework at some point.

Q:

“Our community was going to take the Search Institute survey until we found out how much it costs. We can’t afford it.”

A:

Many of the communities that have conducted the survey have received funding from local businesses or organizations such as the United Way or YMCA. Federal, state, and county grants (such as for substance use prevention or violence prevention) have been used to fund the administration of the survey.

Schools choose the grade levels they want to survey. They don’t have to survey all students in grades 6 through 12. Many schools choose to survey every other grade level, e.g., 6-8-10-12 or 7-9-11. Larger schools or school districts may use a random sample. Search Institute survey staff can provide consultation about which strategy may work best for your situation.

It's not a requirement that communities use the Search Institute survey to build assets for and with their young people or to create a Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth initiative.

Q:

“Despite all the talk about empowerment, this seems like an adult-driven model. Why would our kids buy this any more than they buy anything else that’s given to them by adults?”

A:

Although building assets is indeed empowering for young people, in many ways it's about changing adults, not young people. It's adults who can influence young people in their relationships, in the way they establish supportive environments, and in the programs and practices they implement.

The process of building assets, however, needs to involve young people at every step, from awareness to planning to action. Many initiatives attribute some of their success in their communities to their early involvement of young people. As one high school student in Hampton, Virginia, puts it, you can “make assets cool . . . [and help] young people see how [assets] are important to them, why you're doing what you're doing—make it something young people want to do.”

Q:

“In the end, aren't all kids' problems the responsibility of their parents?”

A:

Without taking anything away from the critical responsibility of parents to build assets with their children, they can't do it by themselves. Even kids with great parents need other adults and their peers also to take the same responsibility. In addition, the reality is that many children—for a variety of reasons—do not get all the support they need from their parents alone. That's why the asset framework emphasizes the need for all adults to try to make positive connections with as many young people as possible, and to reach out to pull together all parts of the community to work *with* parents and guardians for the good of all children. Good parenting provides an indispensable base for the successful transition through adolescence, but other sources of support—teachers, neighbors, community members, older siblings, day-care workers, youth workers, and others—can increase the chances of young people's thriving.

