

ideas for parents

Easy Ways to Build Assets for and with Your Child

FAST FACTS

ASSET #10: Safety

Youth are more likely to grow up healthy when they feel safe at home, at school, and in the neighborhood.

51%

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. "Safety" is one of four empowerment assets.

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

Feeling Safe to Move Forward

Young people who feel threatened, unsafe, or scared often spend a lot of time trapped in fear or in their attempts to protect themselves. They're less likely to venture forth and take some healthy risks. On the other hand, children and teenagers who feel safe are more likely to feel secure enough to try new things. That's why safety is an important empowerment asset. Young people who feel safe at home, at school, and in the community are more likely to make positive contributions.

Yet fear is part of childhood and adolescence. Phyllis Tyson, Ph.D., a clinical professor of psychiatry, says young people face two types of fear: imaginary fears and reality-based fears. Imaginary fears vary depending on the developmental stage your child is going through. For example, toddlers frequently are frightened of toilets, separation, and loud or strange noises. Preschoolers fear monsters and animals. Fears for teenagers often revolve around injuries, natural events, and social situations.

Television, newspapers, and other people



fuel reality-based fears, such as crime and accidents. Parents can also add to this sense of insecurity by feeling anxious and believing the world is a dangerous place. Children and teenagers pick up on our body language, our attitudes, and our beliefs—even when we don't express them consciously.

"Having fears is normal, and acknowledging, understanding, and learning to deal with them is part of the child's continuing development," Tyson says. It's also important to do our part in ensuring that our homes, our schools, our neighborhoods, and our communities are safe places for children.

time together

Three ways to help your children feel safer:

1. Be an "askable" parent, so your children learn they can tell you about things that concern them, especially personal safety issues.
2. Give practical suggestions on how your children can be safe in specific circumstances.
3. Reassure your children that your goal is to keep her or him safe.

Communicating SAFETY

People who feel safe often act in these ways:

- They're relaxed.
- They're warm, open, and friendly.
- They enjoy being creative.
- They dream big and take healthy risks.
- They're confident and secure.

Making a Safer Home

Here are a few ways to make your home safer for both you and your children:

- Keep a fire extinguisher on each floor of your house or keep one in your apartment.
- Once he or she is old enough, make sure your child learns how to use the fire extinguisher.
- Pick a date you'll remember, such as a birthday or holiday, to change smoke and carbon monoxide detector batteries each year.
- Put together an escape plan for a fire, and practice it together.
- Post emergency phone numbers in a visible spot.
- When your child becomes a driver, teach her or him how to change a tire. If possible, invest in a car phone for emergency use only.

Safety Information

These organizations have more in-depth information on safety:

- **National Alliance for Safe Schools, Ice Mountain, P.O. Box 290, Slanesville, WV 25444**
www.safeschools.org (for safe schools).
- **National SAFE KIDS Campaign, 1301 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W., Washington, DC 20004; www.safekids.org** (for safer homes and neighborhoods).
- **Speak Up Campaign National Hotline, (866) SPEAK UP; (for students to anonymously report weapon-related school threats).**

Quick Tip:
Discuss and deal with fears right away.

More Help for Parents

Keeping Kids Safe: A Guide for Parents of Toddlers and Teens—and the Years in Between by Dr. Kenneth Shore. This book addresses many safety issues, from the Internet to child abuse, to finding quality child care. (Published by Prentice Hall.)

talk together

Questions to discuss with your child:

- How safe do you feel at home? At school? In our neighborhood? In our community? In social settings? Why?
- What would help you feel safer?
- Do you think the world is getting more or less safe? Why?

Final Word

“Children deserve to feel safe in their neighborhoods and schools.”

—Jesse Jackson

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