

Character Education Teaching Kids they Matter – Character Development

Ensuring that students are safe, healthy, drug and tobacco free, resilient and compassionate is central to improving academic performance and a major theme throughout both the Amador County Unified School District and the Amador County Office of Education.

During the course of your child's educational career he/she will have the opportunity to participate in many programs that will help to facilitate these traits including: Tomorrow's Leaders Today, Safe School Ambassadors, Breaking Down the Walls, t.p.i.f., Lifeskills, Say No to Drugs and many others depending upon grade and school site. One thing that all students will be exposed to is the Amador Public Schools Character Traits of the Month. Listed below are the traits, by month, so that you can help us instill these characteristics into the actions of our students...your children.

- **September: Respect.** Please emphasize courtesy, patience, tolerance, cooperation and consideration.
- **October: Responsibility.** Please emphasize effort, being prepared, commitment, dependability and accountability.
- **Nov./Dec: Compassion.** Please emphasize love, empathy, kindness, acceptance and forgiveness.
- **January: Integrity.** Please emphasize honor, loyalty, morality, humility and gratitude.
- **February: Citizenship.** Please emphasize justice, service, courage, patriotism and good sportsmanship.
- **March: Self-Discipline.** Please emphasize flexibility, motivation, self-control, organization and perseverance.
- **April: Honesty.** Please emphasize sincerity, fairness, truthfulness, genuineness and trustworthiness.
- **May: Self-Worth.** Please emphasize pride, confidence, self-respect and sense of humor.

Be an asset builder: parents as asset builders

As a parent, care giver or guardian – you are a student's number one asset builder! This is an important responsibility. Below are some things to remember as you go through the year dealing with your child as a "student".

Assets are Powerful!

The Search Institute has identified 40 concrete, positive experiences and qualities – the Developmental Assets – that have a tremendous influence on young people's lives. These assets have the power to influence choices young people make and help them become caring, responsible adults.

Recent research suggests that beyond food and shelter, today's young people need three things for healthy development:

- Safe places
- Caring adults
- Positive activities

Research by Search also shows that the more Assets young people have, the less likely they are to engage in high risk behaviors.

On average, young people with more Assets:

- Engage in fewer negative, high-risk behaviors, such as using drugs and alcohol, being violent, and having premarital sex.
- Exhibit more positive or thriving behaviors such as succeeding in school, exhibiting leadership qualities, and valuing diversity.
- Are more resilient in the face of challenges, stresses and difficult situations.

Everyone's an Asset Builder

Young people need positive external supports and internal strengths – Assets—in order to succeed in life. They need people to help nurture these Assets and help them navigate and thrive in a world that is full of change and challenges.

Everyone is an Asset Builder. It doesn't take money or special training. You can be a child, teenager, single adult, parent, grandparent or neighbor – anyone can build Assets.

Review the *50 Ways to Show You Care* for ideas on how you can start building Assets in the young people in your life.

Asset Categories: The 40 Assets of healthy development that help young people grow up healthy, caring and responsible are divided into eight categories.

The first four Asset Categories focus on external structures, relationships and activities that create a positive environment for young people.

- **Support:** Young people need to be surrounded by people who love, care for, appreciate and accept them.
- **Empowerment:** Young people need to feel valued and valuable. This happens when youth feel safe and respected.
- **Boundaries and Expectations:** Young people need clear rules, consistent consequences for breaking rules, and encouragement to do their best.
- **Constructive Use of Time:** Young people need opportunities – outside of school – to learn and develop new skills and interests with other young adults.

The next four categories reflect internal values, skills and beliefs that young people also need to fully engage with and function in the world around them.

- **Commitment to Learning:** Young people need a sense of the importance of learning and belief in their own abilities.
- **Positive Values:** Young people need to develop strong guiding values or principals to help them make healthy life choices.
- **Social Competencies:** Young people need the skills to interact effectively with others, to make difficult decisions and to cope with new situations.
- **Positive Identity:** Young people need to believe in their own self-worth and to feel that they have control over the things that happen to them.

Affirm...Interact...Engage...Empower

Build Assets in Kids: 25 Ways to Show You Care

1. Notice them
2. Ask them about themselves
3. Be yourself
4. Cheer their accomplishments
5. Go places together
6. Introduce them to new experiences
7. Expect their best; don't expect perfection
8. Catch them doing something right
9. Laugh at their jokes
10. Suggest better behaviors when they act out
11. Hug them.
12. Be curious with them.
13. Play outside together
14. Delight in their discoveries
15. Be available
16. Create a safe, open environment
17. Daydream with them
18. Make decisions together
19. Magnify their magnificence
20. Build something together
21. Let them make mistakes
22. Inspire their creativity
23. Invite them over for juice
24. Listen to their favorite music with them
25. Love them, no matter what

Is this you...

- P I know and use the names of people – young and old- regularly when I see them.
- P I focus daily on all people's gifts and talents.
- P I help youth use their strengths to overcome their deficits.
- P I regularly encourage other adults in my community to build assets with young people.
- P When young people are in trouble, I begin my interactions with them by focusing on their strengths.
- P I'm expanding my positive influence by pursuing relationships with young people I don't know.
- P At least once a week, I do something for or with people that goes beyond their normal expectations.
- P I work hard to maintain relationships with people with whom I am already connected.
- P I have high expectations for myself, my fellow community members, and young people in my community.
- P I take the time to listen when people speak with me.
- P I take the initiative in engaging with people positively.
- P I smile at and make eye contact with any person – young or old- as I go about my day.
- P I believe that my power as an asset builder comes from the relationships that I develop with people.
- P I engage people of all ages positively where ever I go

"No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted." --
Aesop

Tobacco Education: How Parents Can Help Protect Their Children from Becoming Smokers

The majority of parents do not want their child to smoke. Smoking causes a range of serious health risks including lung cancer, heart disease and strokes. It is also the frequent cause of premature disability and death. To make matters worse – smoking is extremely addictive and the addiction comes on quickly – sometimes as quickly as days after one first experiments with tobacco. The truth is -- smoking can harm kids well before they reach adulthood by causing a number of immediate, sometimes irreversible, health risks and problems. Right now, one in five high school students smokes and experimentation can come as early as the fourth grade. According to the most recent California Healthy Kids Survey, 9% of all fifth graders within Amador County Unified School District have tried smoking as well as 6% of seventh graders, 16% of ninth graders and 27% of eleventh graders.

Fortunately, parents can take effective action to help their children not start smoking. Being a good role model is important, but it takes more to prevent children from smoking. Parents must also work against pro-smoking influences outside the home, including efforts to ensure that schools are doing their best to prevent and reduce youth smoking and to reduce cigarette-company marketing that reaches down and influences children. U.S. tobacco companies spend more than \$34 million per day marketing their products and they rely on young smokers to replace their adult customers who quit or die. As one cigarette company executive put it, "the base of our business is the high school student." (Lorillard, *Memo from TL Achey to Lorillard President*, Bates No. TINY0003062.)

Parents as Anti-Smoking Models – Whether or Not You Smoke

What parents say, how they act and the values they communicate through their words and actions has an enormous influence on children – and this applies to tobacco use. Studies have found that parental actions, attitudes and opinions about smoking have a great deal of influence on whether or not their kids smoke. A recent study found that parental antismoking actions such as having restrictions about smoking in the home in place or sitting in non-smoking sections of restaurants are associated with reduction in children's smoking (Andersen, MR, et al, "Antismoking Parenting Practices Are Associated With Reduced Rates of Adolescent Smoking," *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* 158(4); 348-352, April 2004). Specifically, parents can take the following actions to help ensure that their children remain or become smoke free.

- **If you don't smoke, don't start. If you smoke, quit.** Research shows that children who have a parent who smokes are more likely to smoke and to be heavier smokers at young ages. When parents quit smoking, their children become less likely to start smoking and more likely to quit if they already smoke.
- **If you smoke, share your struggles to quit with your children.** Kids greatly underestimate how difficult it is to quit smoking. Showing how hard it is to quit can help eliminate misperception. Continuing to try to quit, despite difficulties, also sends a strong anti-smoking message.
- **Maintain a smoke-free home.** A smoke-free home makes children less likely to smoke, even if their parents smoke. By not allowing anyone to smoke in their homes, parents not only make smoking less convenient for their kids but also make a powerful statement that they believe smoking is undesirable.
- **Tell your kids that you don't want them to smoke and will be disappointed if they do.** Parental attitudes, opinions and feelings about their kids' smoking status greatly influences whether or not kids will smoke, even when parents smoke.
- **Make sure your kids have the facts they need.** By making sure that your kids know how harmful smoking is, you can help your kids develop a firm, negative perception or attitude about smoking practices and their consequences, and kids with such negative perceptions or attitudes are less likely to smoke.
- **Emphasize the immediate health effects.** Most teenagers wrongly believe that smoking will have no direct effect on their health until they reach middle age. But smoking causes many immediate or near-term effects on health, including persistent coughs, respiratory problems, a greater susceptibility to illness and decreased physical performance.
- **Emphasize the effects of smoking on physical appearance.** Cigarette ads create the image that smoking is sexy and attractive, and kids identify improving self-image as a reason for smoking. But smoking actually causes yellow teeth, bad breath, smelly clothes and more severe and early facial wrinkles.
- **Destroy the myth that everyone smokes.** Many kids overestimate the amount of smoking among their peers and such overestimation is among the strongest predictors of smoking initiation. For example, teens believe that 67 percent of adults smoke and that 54 percent of teens are currently smokers, but less than 25 percent of adults and 17 percent of all teens actually do.

Parents can also help keep their kids from smoking by following basic good-parenting practices. For example, kids who do well in school and participate in structured, extra-curricular activities are less likely to be susceptible to smoking – and parents can encourage and support both. As an added bonus, by setting and consistently enforcing realistic rules, talking to their children, paying attention to the kinds

of friends their kids are associating with, and generally staying interested and involved in the lives of their children, parents can reduce the risk of their children smoking and reduce the chances that their children will become involved in other risky behaviors – such as drug and alcohol use.

Good Parenting is NOT Enough

While parents can play an important role in youth smoking prevention, kids are subject to other powerful influences outside their homes that can play a critical role in whether they smoke or not. Most notably, the cigarette companies spend about \$12.5 billion per year to market and promote their products, and most of these marketing efforts reach kids. In fact, research studies have found that kids are three times as sensitive to tobacco advertising than adults, are more likely to be influenced to smoke by cigarette marketing than by peer pressure, and that one third of underage experimentation with smoking is attributable to tobacco company advertising and promotion.

More generally, the big cigarette companies have been trying to shift attention and support away from establishing effective new laws or policies to prevent and reduce tobacco use among kids by promoting the idea that the problem should be left to parents, instead. But dumping the entire burden on parents will not reduce the availability of cigarettes to underage buyers, stop tobacco marketing that reaches kids, establish smoke-free schools, or otherwise reduce youth exposure to tobacco marketing and tobacco use when outside of their homes. To address these powerful factors that influence kids to smoke, parents can take the following actions:

- **Show your kids how cigarette ads and images are designed to manipulate them.** Parents can reduce the powerful impact of all the cigarette ads and positive-smoking images that confront kids every day by talking with their children about the ads' false ideas of glamour, maturity, coolness, and beauty and about how the tobacco companies try to manipulate kids into becoming their future addicted consumers.
- **Make your kids' schools tobacco-free.** By getting more involved in their children's schools, parents can try to make sure that the schools follow effective anti-smoking policies developed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and others, such as:
 - Prohibiting all smoking on school property or at school events.
 - Not accepting any funding, curricula, or other materials from the tobacco industry.
 - Educating students about the short- and long-term negative consequences of tobacco use, and providing peer-pressure refusal skills.
 - Providing prevention education in kindergarten through 12th grade, with intensive education in junior high or middle school and reinforcement in high school.
 - Providing tobacco-prevention training for teachers.
 - Encouraging parental support of school-based tobacco-prevention programs.
 - Offering assistance to both staff and student smokers who wish to quit.
- **Support other local tobacco-prevention efforts**, such as new state or local laws to make restaurants and other public areas smoke-free or new initiatives to enforce the existing laws that prohibit cigarette sales to kids.
- **Support new state and federal laws to restrict cigarette marketing that reaches kids**, such as state laws banning cigarette vending machines or the new federal law to give the U.S. Food and Drug Administration authority over tobacco products and their marketing that parallels the FDA's existing authority over other food and drug products.
- **Support new state and federal programs to prevent and reduce tobacco use among kids**, such as increases to federal or state cigarette taxes (which reduce smoking rates, especially among kids) or new state investments of tobacco-settlement funds in programs to prevent and reduce youth smoking.

There are many ways to take action to influence local, state, and federal laws and programs to prevent and reduce tobacco use among kids. Working with locally-based tobacco prevention coalitions is one terrific option. Another way to take action and keep informed is to visit the Action Center on the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids' website. The Campaign's website is at www.tobaccofreekids.org and the Action Center is at <http://action.tobaccofreekids.org>.