

ideas for parents

Easy Ways to Build Assets for and with Your Child

FAST FACTS

ASSET #37: Personal Power

Youth are more likely to grow up healthy when they feel they have control over things that happen to them.

44%

*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. "Personal power" 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.

Every Person Can Make a Difference

Aja Henderson of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, noticed a problem. A lot of her friends and the neighborhood children didn't have anyone to take them to the library. Many parents worked, and by the time the parents got home, the libraries were closed.

If Aja hadn't had personal power, she would have felt helpless, victimized, and passive. But Aja had a strong sense of personal power. At the age of 12, she opened her own library—in the den of her home.

Today, more than 3,000 titles make up Aja's library, and young children, teenagers, and adults all use it. The library, open seven days a week, doesn't have any set hours. "Sometimes people knock on our door early in the morning before I go to school, or someone stops by pretty late at night," Aja says. "I never turn anyone away. I'm proud that people like to read, and that they'd even give up a Saturday afternoon to spend time at my library."

Aja doesn't think what she has done is anything out of the ordinary. "I'm just a normal American kid," she says. "If I can do something like this, so can other kids. It just takes a little work and some creativity."



time together

Three ways to help your child develop personal power:

1. Encourage your child to serve others. Believing you can make a difference in the world gives an enormous sense of personal power.
2. Advocate that family members form healthy lifestyle habits. People with personal power are less likely to be tired, stressed, and abuse mood-altering substances than people who feel helpless and victimized.
3. Teach your child practical skills such as how to change a tire, cook a couple of meals, and sew on a button. Well-prepared young people are more likely to feel a sense of personal power.

Traits of Children with Personal Power

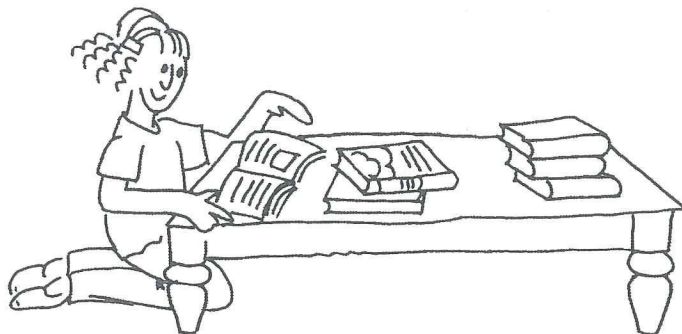
- They believe that when good things happen to them, they somehow contributed to or had some control in that event.
- They do not blame themselves for bad things happening to them; instead, they focus on positive steps they can take to remedy the situation.
- They are active, not passive.
- They feel empowered, not helpless or victimized.
- They believe they can make a difference.



Powerful Coping Techniques

Personal power also pertains to the way children cope with difficulties and stress. Children with personal power use both of these positive coping strategies:

- **Emotion focus**—They talk about the problem. They get emotional support from others. They honestly deal with and work through their feelings.
- **Problem focus**—They gather information, brainstorm solutions, and use problem-solving skills to ease the stress or make the situation less difficult.



Quick Tip:

Involve children of all ages in family decision making.

talk together

Questions to discuss with your child:

- *In what areas of your life do you feel you have the most control? The least? Why?*
- *What are ways you feel you can contribute to the family and to others in the community?*
- *What are healthy ways you can deal with frustrations and challenges?*

More Help for Parents

Stick Up for Yourself! Every Kid's Guide to Personal Power and Positive Self-Esteem by Gershen Kaufman, Ph.D., Lev Raphael, Ph.D., and Pamela Espeland. Written for teenagers, this book is a guide to personal power and positive self-esteem. (Published by Free Spirit.)

Final Word

"I've always thought that you can think positive just as well as you can think negative."

—Sugar Ray Robinson

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