

2. Family Support

Love and support: The family foundation

You can show the children in your family that you love and support them in many ways. When you hug them or say, “I love you,” the sentiment is obvious. Paying attention to them, listening to them, and taking an interest in what they’re doing are less noticeable ways of giving support. After all, does your child feel supported when you come home from an exhausting day, and he or she wants to talk—but you want a break? The young people closest to you know your body language. They listen to what you say—and don’t say. They notice when your words and actions don’t match. Make it a point to be sure they hear your message of love and support loud and clear at all times. **Family Support** is Asset 1 of Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets, the qualities, experiences, and relationships that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.

Here are the facts

Research shows that young people are more likely to grow up healthy when their families provide them with high levels of love and support. It’s important for parents and guardians to create a home environment that fosters loving words and actions, consistency, and openness. About 68 percent of young people, ages 11–18, say their family life provides high levels of love and support, according to Search Institute surveys. Spending quality time together is the first—and most important—step toward establishing a great family support system.

Tips for building this asset

Be consistent. Be loving. Develop openness so that the children in your family know that you’re available and you’ll love them—no matter what. If you’re exhausted or angry, say so. Tell children what you’re feeling so that your body language and words are consistent. Inconsistent messages are often misinterpreted by youth to mean that they have done something wrong.

Also try this

In your home and family: Spend one hour a week alone with each of your children. Take a walk, listen to music, cook together, or just hang out.

In your neighborhood and community: Try to arrange a babysitting swap with a neighbor. It’s important for parents and guardians to have time away from children, doing things they enjoy alone and with other adults. This will make family time that much sweeter.

In your school or youth program: Assign students and participants activities that encourage family sharing. For example, one Minnesota class studying a Native American tribe learned that tribal members passed down stories from one generation to the next. The teacher assigned students to ask their parents for family stories to share with the class.