

3. Other Adult Relationships

When times get tough, kids need adults they can trust

Who did you turn to for advice, comfort, and understanding when you were young? Was there an adult you trusted and enjoyed talking with? If you had an adult outside your family who was there for you during tough times and good times, you probably understand how important a relationship like that is for a young person. Now you can be that adult friend. Whether you're a neighbor, teacher, tutor, coach, aunt, older cousin, or coffee shop worker—you can be a good friend to a young person. Young people want adults besides their parents to count on. Problem is, we live in a society that doesn't always encourage adults and youth to spend time together. But the effort is worthwhile. **Other Adult Relationships** is Asset 3 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 who have three or more caring adults (besides parents or guardians) who support them feel happier and more hopeful, do better in school, and are less likely to rely on drinking, smoking, or drugs to feel good or fit in. About 43 percent of young people, ages 11–18, have three or more nonparent adults in their lives, according to Search Institute surveys. Caring adults are important to the development of young people, especially if those adults are open to discussing tough questions and know how to listen without judging.

Tips for building this asset

Build relationships. Connect with young people outside your own family and make an effort to interact regularly. They need caring adults to bounce ideas off, ask questions of, laugh with, and help sort through sticky situations. If you're a parent, encourage other caring adults to develop a friendship with your children.

Also try this

In your home and family: Think about your child's strengths, talents, and interests. Do you know any adults who share those same qualities? Invite one of them to get to know your child better by coming to a school activity or getting together for dessert or a movie.

In your neighborhood and community: Consider becoming a mentor to one or more young people in your community.

In your school or youth program: Tell young people about an adult who supported you when you were young. Ask them to think about someone they counted on during a tough time. Have the young people pair up and brainstorm ways they could initiate more friendships with other caring adults and what they'd want to get from these relationships.