

31. Restraint

Let them know you're here for them—no matter what

Sex, alcohol, drugs . . . These are subjects many adults would just as soon not discuss with young people. But if parents and other caring adults don't step up and talk to young people about these things, who will? Make it easy for young people to come to you and talk about the temptations in their lives. Avoid judging. Listen, and educate. Restraint is Asset 31 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 refrain from sexual activity and the use of alcohol and other drugs are more likely to grow up healthy. About 45 percent of young people, ages 11–18, believe it's important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs, according to Search Institute surveys. These young people are less likely to chew tobacco or smoke cigarettes, fight, steal, or feel depressed. Further, drinking and driving or riding in a car with someone who's been drinking are also less likely to happen when young people practice restraint.

Tips for building this asset

Communicating with young people about the risks of sex, use of alcohol or other drugs is important. Labeling them as *bad* is not necessarily helpful. Instead, explain the dangers: having sex can lead to pregnancy and disease; using alcohol or other drugs causes you to lose control over your functions, which can lead to serious, even fatal, accidents; substance use can also damage the developing teenage brain. Work with young people to focus on long-term outcomes—not just on the moment. Helping them to internalize and stand up for their personal values also makes it easier for them to practice restraint and withstand negative peer pressure. If they do get in trouble with these issues, though, make sure they know they can come to you for help.

Also try this

In your home and family: Look for opportunities to respond to messages in the media about sexuality and use of alcohol and other drugs. Discuss your reaction and ask for your child's opinion.

In your neighborhood and community: Keep everyone accountable! Make a pact with your neighbors not to allow alcohol at parties for young people—and to report to other parents if you hear of or see young people using alcohol or other drugs.

In your school or youth program: Form a weekly after-school group to promote drug-free and alcohol-free lifestyles, as well as positive decision-making.