

7. Community Values Youth

Listening to diverse opinions can help everyone move ahead

As young people grow older, they quickly sense where they are wanted and where they aren't. Do the young people around you have opportunities to participate, serve, lead, and make decisions within the community? Do these same young people feel the community supports children and youth? If the answer to these questions is "not always" or "not enough," it may be time to make some changes. After all, remember how you felt when you were young and the adults around you didn't listen or give you credit for your opinions? *Everyone* deserves a voice! Community Values Youth is Asset 7 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 perceive that adults in the community value young people are more likely to grow up healthy, exhibit leadership, value diversity, and succeed in school. Only 22 percent of young people, ages 11–18, perceive that adults in the community value their opinions and input, according to Search Institute surveys. Set a goal to create an environment in which you and other adults take time to listen to young people, spend time with them, and give credit to their opinions.

Tips for building this asset

Young people's perceptions can tell you a lot about your community and what needs to happen so they feel the community values them. Ask young people what they think. Acknowledge their opinions, even if you don't agree. Work together to turn your community into a place that values its young people.

Also try this

In your home and family: Ask your child's opinion about something in the news. Listen carefully, without interrupting. Discuss the topic (agreeing to disagree, if necessary).

In your neighborhood and community: Serve on a community committee and seek out young people's feedback about specific issues. Let them know you greatly appreciate their presence and participation. Encourage civic groups to include young people in critical conversations.

In your school or youth program: Engage the young people in your school or program as leaders and decision makers. Get their input on school board or program directors' decisions. Invite them to discuss their experiences with the school board or program directors.