

Search Institute® has identified the following building blocks of healthy development—known as **Developmental Assets®**—that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.

<b>External Assets</b>	<b>Support</b>	<p>1. <b>Family support</b>—Family life provides high levels of love and support.</p> <p>2. <b>Positive family communication</b>—Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.</p> <p>3. <b>Other adult relationships</b>—Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.</p> <p>4. <b>Caring neighborhood</b>—Young person experiences caring neighbors.</p> <p>5. <b>Caring school climate</b>—School provides a caring, encouraging environment.</p> <p>6. <b>Parent involvement in schooling</b>—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.</p>
	<b>Empowerment</b>	<p>7. <b>Community values youth</b>—Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.</p> <p>8. <b>Youth as resources</b>—Young people are given useful roles in the community.</p> <p>9. <b>Service to others</b>—Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.</p> <p>10. <b>Safety</b>—Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.</p>
	<b>Boundaries &amp; Expectations</b>	<p>11. <b>Family boundaries</b>—Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person’s whereabouts.</p> <p>12. <b>School Boundaries</b>—School provides clear rules and consequences.</p> <p>13. <b>Neighborhood boundaries</b>—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people’s behavior.</p> <p>14. <b>Adult role models</b>—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.</p> <p>15. <b>Positive peer influence</b>—Young person’s best friends model responsible behavior.</p> <p>16. <b>High expectations</b>—Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.</p>
	<b>Constructive Use of Time</b>	<p>17. <b>Creative activities</b>—Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.</p> <p>18. <b>Youth programs</b>—Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community.</p> <p>19. <b>Religious community</b>—Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.</p> <p>20. <b>Time at home</b>—Young person is out with friends “with nothing special to do” two or fewer nights per week.</p>

<b>Internal Assets</b>	<b>Commitment to Learning</b>	<p>21. <b>Achievement Motivation</b>—Young person is motivated to do well in school.</p> <p>22. <b>School Engagement</b>—Young person is actively engaged in learning.</p> <p>23. <b>Homework</b>—Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.</p> <p>24. <b>Bonding to school</b>—Young person cares about her or his school.</p> <p>25. <b>Reading for Pleasure</b>—Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.</p>
	<b>Positive Values</b>	<p>26. <b>Caring</b>—Young person places high value on helping other people.</p> <p>27. <b>Equality and social justice</b>—Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.</p> <p>28. <b>Integrity</b>—Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.</p> <p>29. <b>Honesty</b>—Young person “tells the truth even when it is not easy.”</p> <p>30. <b>Responsibility</b>—Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.</p> <p>31. <b>Restraint</b>—Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.</p>
	<b>Social Competencies</b>	<p>32. <b>Planning and decision making</b>—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.</p> <p>33. <b>Interpersonal Competence</b>—Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.</p> <p>34. <b>Cultural Competence</b>—Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.</p> <p>35. <b>Resistance skills</b>—Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.</p> <p>36. <b>Peaceful conflict resolution</b>—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.</p>
	<b>Positive Identity</b>	<p>37. <b>Personal power</b>—Young person feels he or she has control over “things that happen to me.”</p> <p>38. <b>Self-esteem</b>—Young person reports having a high self-esteem.</p> <p>39. <b>Sense of purpose</b>—Young person reports that “my life has a purpose.”</p> <p>40. <b>Positive view of personal future</b>—Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.</p>

Search Institute® has identified the following building blocks of healthy development—known as **Developmental Assets**®—that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.

<b>External Assets</b>	<b>Support</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Family support</b>—Family life provides high levels of love and support.</li> <li>2. <b>Positive family communication</b>—Parent(s) and child communicate positively. Child feels comfortable seeking advice and counsel from parent(s).</li> <li>3. <b>Other adult relationships</b>—Child receives support from adults other than her or his parent(s).</li> <li>4. <b>Caring neighborhood</b>—Child experiences caring neighbors.</li> <li>5. <b>Caring school climate</b>—Relationships with teachers and peers provide a caring, encouraging environment.</li> <li>6. <b>Parent involvement in schooling</b>—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping the child succeed in school.</li> </ol>
	<b>Empowerment</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. <b>Community values youth</b>—Child feels valued and appreciated by adults in the community.</li> <li>8. <b>Children as resources</b>—Child is included in decisions at home and in the community.</li> <li>9. <b>Service to others</b>—Child has opportunities to help others in the community.</li> <li>10. <b>Safety</b>—Child feels safe at home, at school, and in his or her neighborhood.</li> </ol>
	<b>Boundaries &amp; Expectations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. <b>Family boundaries</b>—Family has clear and consistent rules and consequences and monitors the child’s whereabouts.</li> <li>12. <b>School Boundaries</b>—School provides clear rules and consequences.</li> <li>13. <b>Neighborhood boundaries</b>—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring the child’s behavior.</li> <li>14. <b>Adult role models</b>—Parent(s) and other adults in the child’s family, as well as nonfamily adults, model positive, responsible behavior.</li> <li>15. <b>Positive peer influence</b>—Child’s closest friends model positive, responsible behavior.</li> <li>16. <b>High expectations</b>—Parent(s) and teachers expect the child to do her or his best at school and in other activities.</li> </ol>
	<b>Constructive Use of Time</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17. <b>Creative activities</b>—Child participates in music, art, drama, or creative writing two or more times per week.</li> <li>18. <b>Child programs</b>—Child participates two or more times per week in cocurricular school activities or structured community programs for children..</li> <li>19. <b>Religious community</b>—Child attends religious programs or services one or more times per week.</li> <li>20. <b>Time at home</b>—Child spends some time most days both in high-quality interaction with parents and doing things at home other than watching TV or playing video games.</li> </ol>

<b>Internal Assets</b>	<b>Commitment to Learning</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>21. <b>Achievement Motivation</b>—Child is motivated and strives to do well in school.</li> <li>22. <b>Learning Engagement</b>—Child is responsive, attentive, and actively engaged in learning at school and enjoys participating in learning activities outside of school.</li> <li>23. <b>Homework</b>—Child usually hands in homework on time.</li> <li>24. <b>Bonding to school</b>—Child cares about teachers and other adults at school.</li> <li>25. <b>Reading for Pleasure</b>—Child enjoys and engages in reading for fun most days of the week.</li> </ol>
	<b>Positive Values</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>26. <b>Caring</b>—Parent(s) tell the child it is important to help other people.</li> <li>27. <b>Equality and social justice</b>—Parent(s) tell the child it is important to speak up for equal rights for all people.</li> <li>28. <b>Integrity</b>—Parent(s) tell the child it is important to stand up for one’s beliefs.</li> <li>29. <b>Honesty</b>—Parent(s) tell the child it is important to tell the truth.</li> <li>30. <b>Responsibility</b>—Parent(s) tell the child it is important to accept personal responsibility for behavior.</li> <li>31. <b>Healthy Lifestyle</b>—Parent(s) tell the child it is important to have good health habits and an understanding of healthy sexuality.</li> </ol>
	<b>Social Competencies</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>32. <b>Planning and decision making</b>—Child thinks about decisions and is usually happy with results of her or his decisions.</li> <li>33. <b>Interpersonal Competence</b>—Child cares about and is affected by other people’s feelings, enjoys making friends, and, when frustrated or angry, tries to calm her- or himself.</li> <li>34. <b>Cultural Competence</b>—Child knows and is comfortable with people of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds and with her or his own cultural identity.</li> <li>35. <b>Resistance skills</b>—Child can stay away from people who are likely to get her or him in trouble and is able to say no to doing wrong or dangerous things.</li> <li>36. <b>Peaceful conflict resolution</b>—Child seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.</li> </ol>
	<b>Positive Identity</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>37. <b>Personal power</b>—Child feels he or she has some influence over things that happen in her or his life.</li> <li>38. <b>Self-esteem</b>—Child likes and is proud to be the person that he or she is.</li> <li>39. <b>Sense of purpose</b>—Child sometimes thinks about what life means and whether there is a purpose for her or his life.</li> <li>40. <b>Positive view of personal future</b>—Child is optimistic about her or his personal future.</li> </ol>

# PROMOTING PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SELF-REGULATION IN YOUTH PROGRAMS



## TIP SHEET

Programs serving youth have a wide variety of forms and focuses. They can look different, have different audiences, and teach different material. But one nearly universal feature is a focus on personal responsibility, including self-regulation.

This tip sheet provides hands-on ways to encourage personal responsibility in youth. It defines self-regulation and provides skill-building activities to help youth learn how to self-regulate. These activities are designed to support the growth of emotions and cognitive thinking in youth. Developing cognitive skills uses brain-based learning strategies to support healthy decision-making, goal-directed actions, and building internal motivation in youth.

## Self-Regulation and Decision-Making

“Self-regulation ... is managing cognition and emotion to enable goal-directed actions such as organizing behavior, controlling impulses, and solving problems constructively” (Murray et al., 2016). In other words, self-regulation is the skill or process of controlling ourselves, including our thoughts, actions, impulses, appetites, behaviors, body movement, and task performance.

Self-regulation is the opposite of emotional manipulation (Web MD, 2020). Youth often use manipulative tactics when they feel powerless and lack the communication skills to get what they need. Intentionally or unintentionally, youth may use passive-aggressive behaviors and moodiness to avoid or cope with difficult situations. An example is when a youth makes excuses for poor time management. Poor time management skills may be seen as a way to avoid personal responsibility for choices. An excuse could be, “I could not get my homework done because I was busy building my science project.” Environmental factors also influence decision-making (Inanc et al., 2020). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2021), traumatic events that occur in a child’s life from the ages of 0–17 have negative effects on future safety, health, and stability. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) increase toxic stress and impulsiveness. Youth with high ACE scores require program supports to assist in the development of self-regulation strategies (CDC, 2021).

When youth have self-regulation skills, they can face emotions, social situations, and the environment with thoughtfulness. They can control impulses and stop behaving or reacting in negative or harmful ways, leading them to make positive, productive decisions.



## Strategies to Promote Personal Responsibility with Families

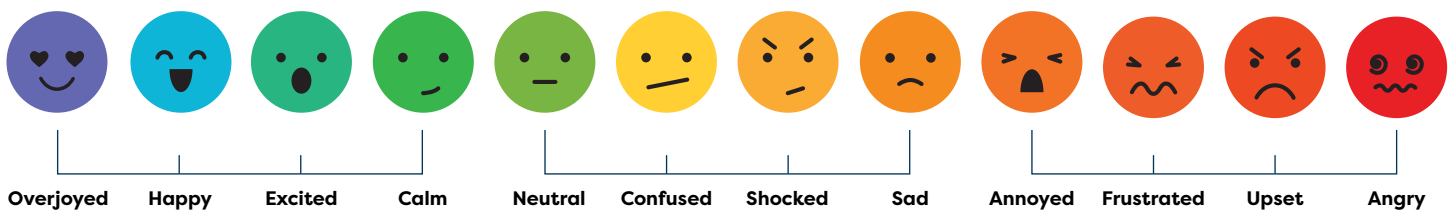
Strategies that target the way youth learn can help build strong neurological connections and promote learning (Jensen, 2005). Since youth programs often engage with families throughout the year, strategies to promote personal responsibility could be covered through parent/caregiver education workshops, newsletters, and social media messaging. These efforts encourage parents and caregivers to take advantage of day-to-day unstructured and structured co-regulation opportunities. The most effective strategies are “warm and responsive interactions in which support, coaching, and modeling are provided to facilitate a child’s ability to understand, express, and modulate thoughts, feelings, and behavior” (Murray et al., 2016).

### Tell stories to identify feelings.

Compelling storytelling develops self-regulation by helping young people identify their feelings. Storytelling uses words and actions to tell the parts of a story and create images while encouraging the listener’s imagination. Literature is rich with language that describes an object or action by stating how it is like something else. This language helps youth build connections and gain understanding. Neuropsychological research shows the benefits of using emotion-rich language to support, practice, and model self-regulation skills. Dr. Modell (2009) describes this type of language as “the currency of the mind” (p. 6). It helps with decision-making, goal setting, and future planning. It supports cognitive processes in the limbic system to move thoughts and ideas between domains and store memories of similarities and differences (Modell, 2005, 2009).

### Use an emotion chart.

Encourage parents and caregivers to model how they respond to the emotions of the day by using emotion regulation charts. Emotion charts help youth identify what they are feeling and how they respond to certain emotions. Ask youth to identify the emotions they experience at various times by pointing out the emotion on a chart and then talking about how the emotion affects them mentally and physically.

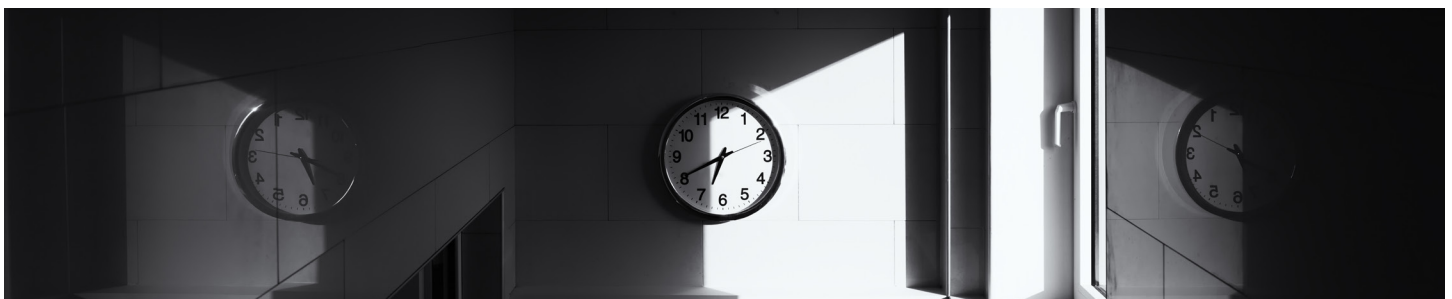


### Share personal experiences.

Parents can help youth identify emotions by sharing examples of how they address emotions. For example, the parent could start by saying, “My boss criticized my work today in front of my co-workers, and I felt embarrassed.” Identify the emotion. Then turn the negative experience into a positive one. For example, “Tomorrow I will request a meeting with my boss, let him know how my work has improved, and request that in the future I would like to receive feedback in a one-on-one setting rather than in front of my co-workers.”

### Reframe past experiences.

Encourage families to teach youth to think about past negative experiences in a different way. These experiences can be used like a rearview mirror when driving a car. The rearview mirror is to glance back to remember where we have been. At the same time, focusing too much on what is behind makes it more likely to miss what is ahead. Give parents skill-building strategies that teach youth to think about the past in a new way to move away from past roadblocks toward future goals.



### Practice conversation starters.

“Conversation Starters” give parents easy-to-use strategies to talk with youth about emotions and how deal with them.

For example:

- Name an emotion you experienced today.
- How do you think you could manage that differently in the future?
- Let’s practice together what you can say next time.

### Enforce natural consequences.

Assist parents in understanding the importance of allowing adolescents to experience the natural consequences of their choices (Cline & Fay, 2020). Personal responsibility is best taught when the stakes are low during early adolescence (e.g., missing lunch because their lunch bag was left at home) rather than when the stakes are high (e.g., drinking and driving).

Suggestions for parents to enforce natural consequences:



Only give consequences that can be enforced.



Always follow through with stated consequences.



Provide tasks for youth to do at home, with appropriate consequences for not following through.



Ask youth to describe how their behavior impacted the family.



Reward youth for character and effort rather than grades.



### Model repair strategies.

Repair strategies are ways in which adolescents resolve problems in speaking, hearing, and understanding conversations. Modeling repair strategies teaches youth critical self-regulation skills.

Suggested repair strategies:



Make it a game to “rewind” or humorously pretend to move backward like a video on rewind, replaying the situation with a more appropriate response.



Request and expect youth to apologize for forgetting to respond appropriately and then restate their comment appropriately.



Ask for forgiveness from those who have been hurt.

Self-regulation is controlling behavior, emotions, and thoughts to be able to reach goals. It’s learning to think before acting. The facts, tips, and suggested resources in this publication can help parents and practitioners come alongside youth in developing this important life skill which can lead to more positive, productive decisions.

## Resources

Centers for Disease Control (2021). *Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences*. Violence Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/fastfact.html>

Cline, F., & Fay, J. (2020). *Parenting with Love and Logic: Teaching Children Responsibility*. Tyndale House Publishers.

Daly, M. (1993). *The Art of Loving Well: A Character Education Curriculum for Today's Teenagers*. Boston University.

Enright, E. (1993). *A Distant Bell*. Doublefields.

Frankl, V. (1993). *Man's Search for Meaning: Experiences in a Concentration Camp*. Beacon Press.

Inanc, H., Meckstroth, A., Keating, B., Adamek, K., Zaveri, H., O'Neil, S., McDonald, K., & Ochoa, L. (2020). *Factors Influencing Youth Sexual Activity: Conceptual Models for Sexual Risk Avoidance and Cessation*.

OPRE Research Brief #2020-153. Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/factors-influencing-youth-sexual-activity-dec-2020\\_0.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/factors-influencing-youth-sexual-activity-dec-2020_0.pdf)

Jensen, E. (2005). *Teaching With The Brain in Mind*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Modell, A. (2005, October). *Emotional Memory, Metaphor, and Meaning*. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 555–568.

Modell, A. (2009). *Metaphor: The Bridge Between Feelings and Knowledge*. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, (29), 6–11. DOI: 10.1080/07351690802246890

Murray, D. W., Rosanbalm, K., & Christopoulos, C. (2016). *Self-regulation and Toxic Stress: Seven Key Principles of Self-regulation in Context*. OPRE Report #2016-39. Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Web MD. (2020, November). *Signs of Emotional Manipulation*. <https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/signs-emotional-manipulation>

Adverse Childhood Experiences – Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have a tremendous impact on future violence, victimization and perpetration, and lifelong health and opportunity of individuals. Working together, we can help create neighborhoods, communities, and a world in which every child can thrive. This CDC site offers resources to learn more about preventing ACEs in your community by assuring safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments. (<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/index.html>)

Conceptual Models to Depict the Factors that Influence the Avoidance and Cessation of Sexual Risk Behaviors Amount Youth – This brief was developed as part of a portfolio of youth-focused projects on sexual risk avoidance and cessation sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The brief presents two initial, complementary conceptual models—one for sexual risk avoidance and a second for sexual risk cessation—that aim to guide efforts to prevent youth risk behaviors and promote optimal health. (<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/conceptual-models-depict-factors-influence-avoidance-and-cessation-sexual-risk>)

50 Great Feelings Charts (for kids and adults). Emotion charts can help identify how a person is feeling. The feeling chart or wheel is a printable tool to help someone open up about their feelings, ask questions, or express concerns. (<https://printabletemplates.com/graphics/feelings-chart/>)

The Adolescent Brain: Understanding Behavior – This presentation, part of the series of Schools in Mind expert advice videos, explains the changes happening within the adolescent brain during development and how those changes can impact behavior. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3l1xVzESqc>)

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