

Asset-Building Ideas for Neighbors and Neighborhood Groups

A neighborhood is more than a place where people sleep or grab a bite to eat. A neighborhood can and should be an important community in which people of all ages feel cared for and secure. This kind of neighborhood isn't the norm in most communities, but with a focus on asset building it could be. Two of the 40 Developmental Assets™ (#4: caring neighborhood; and #13: neighborhood boundaries) focus specifically on the important role neighbors have in building assets. Here are ideas on how neighbors can build assets.

Individuals

- Learn the names of kids who live around you. Find out what interests them.
- Treat neighbors of all ages with respect and courtesy; expect them to treat you with respect and courtesy too.
- If you live in an apartment or condominium, spend time in gathering places, such as front steps, courtyards, meeting rooms, pools, laundry rooms, and lobbies. Greet and talk with others there. If you have a front yard, hang out there once in awhile.
- Take personal responsibility for building neighborhood boundaries. When you see someone in the neighborhood doing something you think is inappropriate, talk to her or him about why it bothers you.
- Find other neighbors who want to make a long-term commitment to asset building. Begin developing strategies for working together to build assets in your neighborhood.
- Take time to play or just be with the young people on your block or in your building. Encourage them to talk and then listen to what they have to say:
- Invite neighbors (especially those with children and teenagers) to your home. Get to know each other and find out what you have in common.
- Once in a while, leave messages (with chalk on sidewalks or by hanging notes on doors) saying how much you appreciate a certain neighbor. Do this for neighbors of all ages.
- If you have children, talk to other parents about the boundaries and expectations they have for their children. Discuss how you can support and respect each other.
- Figure out what you can provide for young people in your neighborhood. Can you set up a basketball hoop? Can you offer some space for a neighborhood garden? Can you give one hour of your time on weekends to shoot baskets with young people who live near you?
- If you have concerns about your neighborhood, talk with other neighbors about your feelings. If others share your concerns, gather a group to work on addressing them. Even if you don't solve all of the problems, you'll strengthen your neighborhood through the process.

- Attend a game, play, or event that a neighborhood child or teenager is involved in. Congratulate the young person after the event.
- Be aware of graduations and other major events in the lives of children.
- Once you know your neighbors, find out more about their extended family and friends. Some elderly people have grandchildren who visit. Or parents may have custody of their children on certain days of the week. Get to know these young people who periodically visit.
- Pay attention whenever you see a young person. Take time to smile and say hello. If you have a few moments, stop and visit. Do this while you're walking, waiting for a bus, or waiting in line somewhere.

Groups

- Start a neighborhood group. Focus on safety, neighborhood improvement, or just having fun.
- Organize a neighborhood book swap. Ask neighbors to donate books they've already read and have everyone come to find new books.
- Start a neighborhood check-in program. Form small clusters and check in with each other on a regular basis. If someone needs help or support, gather a group to pitch in and help out.
- If you have problems with crime or safety in your neighborhood, regularly talk with your local police department to find out what is being done to address the issues. Ask them what you and other neighbors can do to make a difference.

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