

## THE AMERICAN **Family Assets** STUDY

### The American Family Assets Study

#### DISCUSSION STARTERS FOR FAMILIES AND THOSE WHO SUPPORT THEM

The *American Family Assets Study* from Search Institute introduces a new framework of Family Assets and presents findings about the state of these assets among families with 10 to 15 year olds in the United States. Below are some questions you can use to explore the study and its implications for your family, families you work with, and the broader community and society.

*To learn more about the study, visit [www.search-institute.org/familyassets/study](http://www.search-institute.org/familyassets/study)*

#### EXPLORING THE STUDY'S KEY FINDINGS

- This study begins with the belief that we, as a society, spend too much time focusing on families' weaknesses and problems, and not enough time focusing on their strengths. How is that perspective consistent with or different from your own experiences?
- Read through the Family Asset framework. Which of the Family Assets have been particularly important to you and your family? Which ones have been less important to you? What does reviewing this framework make you think about or wonder?
- This study found that the average family scored 47 out of 100 on the Family Assets Index, with relatively few families scoring very high (11%) and relatively few families scoring very low (17%). Thinking of the families you know, what range do you think most of them would fit in?
- With a few exceptions, virtually all kinds of families – regardless of family structure, demographics, or income – score at relatively the same levels on the Family Assets Index. That suggests that all families can be both strong (high levels) and challenged (low levels). How does that finding compare with your experiences and perspectives?

For information on the research behind the family assets, visit [www.search-institute.org/familyassets](http://www.search-institute.org/familyassets)

For practical ways to build assets in your family, visit [www.ParentFurther.com/familyassets](http://www.ParentFurther.com/familyassets)

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- Of the five Family Asset categories, families tend to score lowest on: Establishing Routines; Adapting to Challenges; and, Connecting to Community. What is it that makes these three areas harder for families? What could be done to help families build strengths in these areas?
- The number of assets a family has is directly associated with diverse positive outcomes for both young people and parenting adults. (Because of how this study was done, we cannot claim that Family Assets “cause” these outcomes.) Why do you think people’s experiences of these assets are related to positive outcomes, such as healthy lifestyles, educational success, and civic participation?
- *The American Family Assets Study* focuses on families with 10 to 15 year old youth in them. In what ways do you see the Family Assets framework being relevant and useful to other families? What might be different if the study were conducted with other families?

### DISCUSSION STARTERS FOR YOUR FAMILY

- Think about your own family. What are some of the qualities and experiences in your family that you most value? Where do you see those qualities reflected in the Family Assets framework? What other qualities might you emphasize?
- Which of the Family Assets has been most important to your family? Talk about some of the ways it has made a difference for you.
- Everyone in a family contributes to building Family Assets. Look through the assets and identify ways that each family member has contributed to making three or four of the assets stronger in your family.
- Who are people and places outside of your immediate family who help your family build Family Assets? What do they do that is particularly meaningful? How might you show them that you appreciate their support for your family? How do you help build assets in other people’s families?

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- Are there one or two of the Family Assets that you'd really like to work on in your family? What are concrete steps you can take together to strengthen that asset?

### DISCUSSION STARTERS FOR THOSE WHO WORK WITH FAMILIES

- How do the study's findings reflect what you see in the families you serve? Many programs that serve families focus on the most vulnerable or fragile families. What information from this study is most relevant to your work with these families?
- In general, how much do your programs and practices focus on families' challenges vs. their strengths? What value do you see in emphasizing strengths or assets? What are the risks?
- How might the Family Asset framework inform or enrich your understanding of and work with families? In what ways does it reinforce what you are already doing? In what ways does it challenge you to rethink or refine what you do?
- How might your programs and services help families address the gaps they experience in Family Assets? How might you more effectively acknowledge the assets that families have?
- Which of the Family Assets is your program most suited to intentionally address with the families you serve? What would be next steps in strengthening the ways your program addresses those assets?

### DISCUSSION STARTERS FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS AND COALLITIONS

- What two or three key findings in the study have the most potential to stimulate discussion and positive action in your community? Who needs to hear those findings?
- How might families in your community look similar to or different from the families that were surveyed in *The American Family Asset Study*? How might a study focused just on families in your community reveal different results?

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- What are ways that programs, services, or opportunities in your community make it easier or harder for families to build Family Assets? Think of specific examples.
- What proportion of discussions, debates, and planning in your community focus on the structure of families versus the ways families interact and the quality of relationships (such as those highlighted in the Family Assets framework)? How might a greater emphasis on Family Assets change the nature of the conversation and planning?
- In general, how do the media and other influencers portray families in your community? How realistic are those portrayals and public perceptions of families? How might the Family Assets framework and this research challenge inaccurate stereotypes of families and begin to tell a different story about families in your community?
- Families say they are most likely to seek support from extended family and neighbors. When asked about institutions, they said that faith communities (e.g., churches, mosques, synagogues), out of all institutions, do the most to help strengthen their families. Overall, almost one-third of families indicated that their religious institution helps a lot, compared to only about 1 in 10 who said schools, health care providers, a counselor or social worker, a place of employment, and another organization helped to strengthen their family. What are the implications of this finding for how your community works together to support families and build their strengths?
- If your community could do just one or two things to help build Family Assets, what would be the most important thing to do first?

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