



# Building Assets for Hard-to-Reach Kids

One of the fundamental principles of asset building is that *all* children and youth need assets. Yet most people and organizations have some young people with whom they interact regularly, some with whom they interact occasionally, and others with whom they have no contact at all. Unfortunately, kids who are disconnected from one part of the community are often disconnected from most parts of the community. These “hard-to-reach” kids may be the ones most in need of asset building. There are at least two keys to building assets for hard-to-reach kids; the first is reaching out to them and the second is providing them with asset-building opportunities and relationships. Here are some ideas on how to do each:



## REACHING OUT TO HARD-TO-REACH KIDS

- ✦ **Be truthful and sincere with young people;** tell them why you are reaching out to them and why you care.
- ✦ **Think about why some kids are hard to reach.** Are they staying away from you or are you staying away from them? If they are staying away from you, invite a few kids you trust to talk with you about how they think you could reach out to others. If you are choosing to work with young people with whom you are most familiar, challenge yourself to reach beyond what’s comfortable for you.
- ✦ **Once you successfully reach out to and get to know a few young people, ask them to spread the word among their friends.** Train youth to be asset-building leaders and peer helpers.
- ✦ **Volunteer in an alternative school,** GED program, or program for teenage parents.
- ✦ **Go to places where young people hang out.** Get to know young people there.
- ✦ **Head to detention.** Volunteer to supervise a detention hall and befriend those who are there.
- ✦ **Publicize and offer free food** whenever you have some kind of youth activity. Food is often a good way to draw people in.
- ✦ **Volunteer at drop-in centers** and arrange to lead some constructive activities, such as a basketball game or a juggling seminar.

## BUILDING ASSETS FOR HARD-TO-REACH KIDS

- ✦ **Be authentic.** Don’t try to be something you’re not because you think hard-to-reach kids will like you more. They’ll figure out that you are not being yourself and then they won’t trust you.
- ✦ **Always make time for young people** when they need or want to talk or just be with someone. Make relationship building your first priority.



- ✦ **Focus on drawing out young people's strengths** rather than changing what you think is wrong with them.
- ✦ **Work with young people to create safe places for them to spend time**—places where they feel not only physically safe but also safe to be themselves.
- ✦ **Find out what positive activities young people are already involved or interested in** and build on and encourage those.
- ✦ **Challenge young people to set goals** that are beyond what is comfortable for them, and then help them develop the skills to achieve those goals.
- ✦ **Learn about signs of depression, chemical abuse, eating disorders, gang involvement, and physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.** Know what resources in your community are available for kids who are struggling or in crisis. Find out who you can turn to if you feel a young person needs more help than you can offer.
- ✦ **Be prepared to have your goodwill and commitment tested.** Hard-to-reach kids have usually been let down by adults and might be skeptical about what you have to offer.
- ✦ **Give young people many opportunities to be leaders** in formal and informal ways.
- ✦ **Offer support groups, activities, and counseling with an explicit asset-building focus.** Train youth to lead peer support groups.
- ✦ **Teach young people problem-solving skills** such as using Peaceful Conflict Resolution (asset 36), Interpersonal Competence (33), and Planning and Decision Making (32).
- ✦ **Create opportunities for young people to make real contributions** to their communities through service projects.
- ✦ **Offer skill-building training for adults.** Focus on things such as Family Support (asset 1), Adult Role Models (14), and Achievement Motivation (21).
- ✦ **Take a positive, asset-driven approach to young people.** Instead of labeling them “at risk,” think of them as having great potential.
- ✦ **Treat all young people with respect and care.**
- ✦ **Learn to trust young people** to make decisions and take responsibility.
- ✦ **Set, communicate, and uphold clear limits and boundaries.**
- ✦ **Withhold judgment,** especially about past behavior.
- ✦ **Offer young people opportunities** to see and experience other lifestyles and new situations.
- ✦ **Link hard-to-reach young people with caring, principled adults.** Train the adults beforehand so they're familiar with the 40 Developmental Assets and how to nurture them.
- ✦ **Be an advocate for individual young people** as well as youth in general.