

Family Assets ... Building Blocks for Life



Fact Sheet



Family Life Month Packet
Family and Consumer Sciences

Culturally Competent Families

Laura Stanton, Extension Agent, Family and Consumer Sciences, Community Development, Butler County

The Search Institute in Minnesota has been conducting research to better understand what kids need to succeed. They have identified 40 concrete, positive experiences and qualities that they call “developmental assets” that appear to have a tremendous influence on young people’s lives. The power of these assets is evident across all cultural and socioeconomic groups. It seems that the assets protect young people from many different problems, such as alcohol use, illicit drug use, sexual activity, and violence. In addition, the assets promote positive attitudes and behaviors, such as success in school, maintaining good health, and valuing diversity. The research indicates that the more developmental assets children have, the more likely they are to succeed in life.

What is Cultural Competence?

The Search Institute has divided the 40 developmental assets into external and internal assets. One of the asset categories for internal assets is labeled social competencies. In this category, the Search Institute has identified cultural competence as a developmental asset. Their definition of cultural competence is a young person who has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This asset is important in our ever-changing cultural society, yet the research suggests that only 35% of young people possess the asset of cultural competence.

When it comes to the development of cultural competence, many social scientists focus on the family. Generally, parents are considered to be the primary influence in the development of children’s attitudes toward different

ethnic and cultural groups. In order to help children become culturally competent, we must start with the family and move outward from there.

Modeling Cultural Competence

Parents who wish to develop a culturally competent home environment first need to examine their own attitudes and behaviors. It is unreasonable to expect our children to behave in ways that we do not. If we wish for our children to be culturally competent, then we must be culturally competent. For this to happen, we need to be accepting of and open-minded about differences. And more importantly, we need to actively seek out opportunities to develop cultural competence. If we take a passive approach, we tend to fall into a pattern that fails to counteract the pervasive negative messages about cultural and ethnic differences.

Ways to Build Cultural Competence

Below are 20 ways that you and your family can learn more about other cultures and develop cultural competence.

- Acknowledge that we live in a society with pervasive biases.
- Honor and celebrate the holidays of different ethnic and religious groups.
- Bring books, dolls, music, images, and toys into your home that reflect diversity.
- Travel to areas in the United States and around the world where you can immerse yourself in another culture.

- Explore your own family’s cultural and ethnic heritage.
- Visit culturally rich art galleries and museums. Attend culturally diverse dance performances, musicals, concerts, festivals, and other events.
- Show that you value diversity in the friends you choose and in the businesses you utilize.
- Talk about stereotypes and discrimination. Encourage children to tell you if they witness prejudice or are a victim of it.
- Get involved with an organization that works in the area of social justice.
- Learn a second or third language.
- Discuss issues that you hear on the radio and see on TV or in movies.
- Be respectful. Create a family rule that makes it unacceptable to tease others because of their culture or ethnicity.
- Visit different religious and spiritual places of worship.
- Initiate activities and discussions that build positive self-identity and self-esteem. If we feel good about ourselves, we are less likely to make fun of others.
- Develop family goals to help eliminate cultural bias and prejudice.
- Judge people by their qualities and not their looks.
- Dine at ethnic restaurants.
- Talk positively about people’s physical characteristics and cultural heritage.
- Broaden your family’s social circle. Provide opportunities to interact with people with different cultures, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and abilities.

- Be patient. Change takes time. Realize that transforming attitudes and behaviors can be challenging.

As our society is becoming more diverse, many resources are available to assist individuals, families, and communities in their efforts to be culturally competent. If you would like additional suggestions and ideas about becoming a culturally competent family, the resources below can help you get started.

References

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For more information from The Search Institute, visit their web site at www.search-institute.org

Family and Consumer Sciences, 1787 Neil Avenue, Columbus, OH 43210

For more information, visit the Human Development and Family Life web site at:
<http://www.hec.ohio-state.edu/famlife/index.htm>

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Keith L. Smith, Associate Vice President for Ag. Adm. and Director, OSU Extension
 TDD No. 800-589-8292 (Ohio only) or 614-292-1868