



Search Institute Statement Regarding Asset 19: Religious Community

Asset 19, Religious Community, is one of four assets included in the External Asset Category Constructive Use of Time. The definition for Religious Community is “Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.” This asset is included in the framework of 40 developmental assets for two reasons:

- First, the potential positive benefit of engagement in activities offered by religious institutions; and
- Second, the recognition of the importance of individuals as well as multiple institutions and socializing systems within a community in contributing to the well-being of children and adolescents.

Research conducted by Search Institute suggests that young people’s experiencing of greater numbers of assets is associated with decreased involvement in risky behaviors (such as alcohol use, alcohol dependence, marijuana and other drug use, delinquency, early sexual activity), and lower levels of depression. As stated in Search Institute’s publication *Developmental Assets: A Synthesis of the Scientific Research on Adolescent Development* (Scales & Leffert, 1999), further research shows that youth involvement in congregational activities is associated with positive adaptation, increased sense of well-being, increased self-esteem, and increased life satisfaction. The positive impact of such involvement may be due to a variety of factors. For example, when involved in religious community activities youth are likely to be supervised by responsible adults. They also are prone to experiencing support from caring and responsible peers and adults. In addition, they may experience engagement in constructive activities (such as music, leadership development, and service to others), the opportunity to deepen prosocial values, and to learn new things about themselves that enhance their identity. Strengthening of family bonds and communication also may occur if young people and their families share such experiences.

The survey question that measures Asset #19 asks, “During an average week, how many hours do you spend going to programs, groups, or services at a church, synagogue, mosque, or other religious or spiritual place.” Neither the question nor the definition of this asset are intended to address a specific religious belief, prayer practice, or specific attendance at religious services. Instead, the question only attempts to measure the extent to which a youth is involved in activities.

Involvement in religious community is probably important to young people for many different reasons. Certain youth may spend time participating in community service projects like feeding the homeless and/or sports activities, but rarely, if ever, attend services. For other youth it may be attendance at services or active participation in other aspects of a particular faith that is significant.

Search Institute Statement
Regarding Asset 19: Religious Community
Page 2

The framework of developmental assets emphasizes the community context for child and adolescent development, recognizing that many different people, institutions and socializing systems have roles to play in fostering developmental strengths. The framework explicitly identifies the contribution of family, neighborhood, school, peers, community youth programs, as well as congregations. No single entity, such as families, schools or congregations, is responsible for building all 40 developmental assets. Rather, the framework invites all individuals and institutions within the community, including religious institutions, to be active builders of positive child and youth development.

Search Institute is an independent, nonprofit, nonsectarian organization whose mission is to advance the well-being of adolescents and children by generating knowledge and promoting its application.