

exercise #5 What assets help our children to thrive?

objective

To identify assets that support and protect children in the area

time span

approximately 1 hour

materials

- ☐ thread, string, or yarn
- ☐ flipchart paper
- ☐ markers
- ☐ masking tape
- ☐ medium-size balloons (inflated)

product

Lists of assets and protective factors

Thread Game

What is this tool?

This tool helps participants to explore and identify local assets that support and protect children in the area.

Recommended Process

Action: Arrange five chairs in a five-point star at the front of the room. Ask five volunteers to come forward and to sit in the chairs. Ask each volunteer to share their name with the group.

Tell the group:

“We know that the more people that get involved in the life of a young person, the stronger that young person’s ‘web of support’ will be. Whoever these people may be, they create the foundation for a caring ‘web of support’.”

“I will go around the room and ask each of you to identify one support, one asset, or one thing that children need to succeed. For each asset you name, the yarn will be passed, randomly, between the five volunteers sitting in the chairs. They will build a ‘web of support’. Each strand represents one protective factor or asset.”

“After we get warmed up with the game, anyone can call out a support or asset.”

Ask the five volunteers to each hold the strand(s) of yarn with one hand and to pass the ball of thread with the other hand. Ask the volunteers to pass the ball of thread randomly around and across the web for each asset identified and to keep the yarn taut (tight).

Action: Give positive feedback for answers and repeat the asset identified (if you think that some people couldn’t hear the suggestion). Keep track of the number of assets identified. Write them on a flip chart. (Sometimes it is good to have someone else counting for you and letting you know how many strands you have. Or you could simply look at the web of support and know that if you see a star with a border, you have 10 assets. When you see a star with at least 6 strings “doubled up” you have at least 16 assets. When the web is pretty solid, you probably have more than 30).



Tips for Facilitators

- Encourage the participants to answer and support them by asking them for an asset a different way, i.e. what is something that helped YOU grow up strong and healthy? – or allow them to ask others for their ideas.

Thread game notes

Action: Stop when ten strands/assets make up the web of support.

“Children who have ten assets or less are often referred to as ‘at-risk’. It could be that there are some of these youth in your community as well.”

Testing the Safety Net

Action: Drop a balloon (a metaphor for a child or teen) onto the web.

“Notice that the balloon gets caught in some areas.” (Always focus on the positive first). “Also notice how the balloon falls through some holes because there just aren’t enough strands in the safety net.”

“What does this child need to fill in some of the holes?”

LISTEN – Wait for someone in the audience to respond “More assets...”

“That’s right. Let’s keep building. What else do children need to succeed...”

Action: Continue to identify assets, while building a strand for each. (If the audience is having trouble, you can continue to ask, “What else do kids need to succeed” or say “Think back when you were a young person, what did you need in your life to succeed?” Continue to identify assets while building a strand for each.)

Action: Stop at 18. Drop a balloon on the safety net again.

“In some countries, 18 is the average number of assets that exist for youth.”

“As you can see, this web of support is stronger than the one with only ten assets, however, there are still areas where this balloon can fall through the cracks, just as a child with 18 assets still may be at risk.”

“How can we add a strand that makes this hole smaller, or that hole smaller?”

Action: Draw your finger across the place where a strand needs to be. The answer that will usually come is “Add more people.” Ask the people who are holding up the strands to invite four to 6 more people to join the circle. They will usually ask people to join in by name. And, this is your opportunity to talk to the audience about the power of inviting people into the lives of youth, by name.

Action: Continue building the web of support. Keep asking, “What do kids need to succeed?” Add another 12 assets. Now we have more than 30 assets.

“Now we have more than 30 strands in our web of support, which represent 30 assets in a child’s life.”

Action: Place the balloon (the child/teen) upon the web of support. It will now be very difficult for the balloon to accidentally hit the floor. Compare this web of support to the first two and ask the audience what they think.

“We have shown that one thing the web of support does is keep the balloon from hitting the floor. It acts as a safety net for our balloons, and our children.”

“This is the power of assets. We will never be able to legislate values, morality, nor decency. We may always have alcohol in our communities, (and other problems relevant to that community). However, with people working together to build assets in youth, we are able build a community where youth can succeed and thrive.”

Action: Push a balloon through the web of support.

“Some youth may still find a way to fall through this supportive web, no matter how strong it is.”

Action: Talk about some of the metaphors you see in the supportive web.

Thread game notes

Ask the audience to reflect on the symbolism of the web for them or maybe a story that the web represents.

Action: After this discussion, ask participants to lay yarn carefully flat on floor. Ask them to try to preserve the integrity of the web.

What have you learned from the exercise?

- From the web exercise – draw or list the things that your community currently does to support children to become successful.
- What traditions, practices help children develop well?
- What are the supportive factors in your community that keep the ‘balloons’ in the air?

Work in small groups to discuss the following questions:

- What are the risk factors that you want to address or change?
- What are the gaps or areas of concern that you have for children in your community?

Give time for each group to share their gaps and priorities. Let the other groups comment, agree, question, and discuss.

- What further information is needed to understand these issues?

Explain to the starter group that we'll all be participating in a process to talk to groups in the community about child well-being in the coming weeks. Our experience in exploring our understanding of child well-being and the assets of children in our communities helps us to prepare for this.