

Connecting with Kids

Happy 2004-05 school year! New school years are like new calendar years – a time for reflecting on the experiences we've had in the past and thinking about what possibilities the future might hold. The Arlington Partnership for Children, Youth, and Families has been thinking and reflecting too and we are moving into this new school year with a plan to re-energize our asset-building efforts. The Partnership is launching the **Connect with Kids –Assets Make the Connection** campaign and we invite all Arlington adults to be part of this effort.

First, a little background . . . As many of you know “assets” are the good things that **all** children and teens need in their lives – things like support, clear and consistent boundaries, and high expectations. They are the opportunities, relationships, values, self-perceptions, or attitudes that must be woven into the lives of children and teens. Research shows children with lots of assets get involved in very few risk behaviors (alcohol use, shoplifting, depression, etc.) and they are much more likely to do the positive things we value, like succeeding in school, valuing diversity and exhibiting leadership. (For more information go to www.arlingtonpartnershipforyouth.org).

The Partnership is still all about Assets but this year we're asking the community to focus on the important role **all** adults can play in making connections with children and teens. In the next few months, hopefully, you will see lots of information about Arlington's campaign to “Connect with Kids”. The idea is surprisingly simple, but very powerful. **Children and teens need adults in their lives, and any adult can make a positive difference in the lives of young people.** The evidence is very clear: to grow-up healthy, young people need to be connected to a network of caring adults, in addition to their parents. The good news is, here in Arlington, we know that 42% of our 6th-12th grade students already report having “other” adults in their lives. So we are off to a great start!

But there is still lots more to do. **More than half of our teens do not have a network of caring non-parent adults in their lives.** So, what can you as Taylor parents do?

Of course you have an essential role to play in nurturing your relationships with your own children. **But you can also be that caring adult in the lives of other people's children.** It's easy to do and even the smallest things can make a big, big difference in a child's life. Here are a few ideas:

- Smile at children and teens when you see them on the street or at the mall – Don't make them feel invisible in their own community!
- Welcome your children's friends into your house. Take the time to talk with them.
- Be a good role model for children – remember they are always watching and listening.
- Support your own children's relationships with adult neighbors, friends and family.
- Encourage inter-generational opportunities in your neighborhood, school or faith community.
- Ask children and teens to help out with planning community events and projects.

Next month we'll go back to assets and parenting. Please let me know what parenting/Assets topics would be helpful for future Taylor Tattler articles.

For more information about **Connect with Kids and Assets**, please contact Mary Ann Moran, Arlington Partnership for Children, Youth and Families at 703-228-1671 or e-mail at mmoran@co.arlington.va.us.