



November Asset of the Month: POSITIVE CULTURAL IDENTITY

Young people feel comfortable with and proud of their identity, including but not limited to disabilities, ethnicity, faith/religion, family status, gender, language, and sexual orientation.

This document is designed to help adults throughout Silicon Valley develop materials and activities to promote the asset of “Positive Cultural Identity.”

Newsletter Content

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The Importance of Positive Cultural Identity

Research shows that positive identity in general is linked with several beneficial outcomes, including self assurance, a sense of belonging, a positive view of personal future, and better adjustment in school. But, developing a sense of positive cultural identity—a critical element of personal identity—can be difficult for young people, especially if their identity lies in two or more cultures: their identity in the majority culture as well as in their own cultural group.

The way that youth are treated in regard to their ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or gender directly affects their ability to develop a positive personal identity. As adults, it’s critical that we model recognition, understanding, and celebrating all cultural identities, including the cultures to which we and/or our children do not belong.

Sharing and celebrating different cultural identities not only enhances individuals’ self esteem but promotes cultural competence among all young people. Silicon Valley’s exceptionally diverse community can only benefit from building greater esteem and understanding both within and among the many cultural groups in our region.

The following discussion topic, some of which are adapted from the Canadian Child Care Federation’s “Supporting Our Children’s Social Well-Being...It’s a Team Effort!” workshop, can help families talk with young people about their cultural identity:

- What is our cultural background?
- What are some things that you value because it’s valued by our culture?
- What are some things about our culture that you would like other people to know?
- Do you know anyone who’s from a different culture? In what ways are your cultures similar and different? Do your cultural differences make it difficult to be friends? How can you share your cultural differences in a positive, nonjudgmental way?

This article was provided courtesy of Project Cornerstone’s Asset-a-Month program. For more information, visit www.projectcornerstone.org.

Activities

The activities below offer a starting point to help build positive cultural identity in youth.

For families...

- Make sure that your children learn the story of where they come from—including both family history and the history of their heritage—from an early age.
- Even very young children are aware of racial and cultural differences among people. Instead of pretending that the differences don't exist, address the issues of stereotypes, myths, and cultural differences in a positive, age-appropriate manner.
- It's normal for young people to explore different aspects of personal identity, including cultural identity. Children whose parents promoting a positive cultural identity while allowing them the freedom to explore their own identity tend to develop a healthy personal identity.
- Some elements of a child's identity—such as sexual orientation—might not be shared in common with the rest of the family. Parents should make special efforts to ensure that everyone feels understood, respected, valued, safe, and loved within the family.

For all adults...

- Serve as a mentor for youth from your culture. They will benefit from learning how to successfully maintain a positive cultural identity from someone outside their family.
- Help your children maintain a positive attitude about school, and make sure they know that you will be their advocate to resolve any problems or challenges that they encounter.
- Adults should be careful to strike a balance between celebrating the youth's difference and including the youth as part of the group as a whole. Sometimes, focusing too much on a youth's differences—no matter how good the intention—can further isolate youth from their peers.

In schools and youth programs...

- Support home languages as much as possible. Children who are bilingual in their home language and English tend to maintain a positive connection with their families and cultural communities.
- All students need to be valued and appreciated for their unique characteristics regularly. Be aware of the cultural diversity in your classroom or program, and try to understand its dimensions.
- Make a personal effort to learn about the culture of the youth in your classroom or program. For example, students from cultures where children are not expected to ask questions of adults may have difficulty letting you know when they don't understand the lesson. Help students understand the culture of your class or program without devaluing their cultures of origin.
- Young people can discover and share their cultural identity through lessons and projects that highlight their cultures and experiences while engaging them in active learning. For example, develop lessons and activities around the gifts that different cultures have given the world, and discuss how “cultural borrowing” allows everyone to thrive.
- Sometimes even the most innocuous activities can be unintentionally exclusionary. For example, celebration of “Crazy Hair Day” may exclude youth whose religion requires that they cover their heads. Be sure that your planned programs and activities take everyone's culture into account.

Resources

- Project Cornerstone’s Cultural Heritage Asset Programs provide a literature-based parent engagement curriculum and comprehensive asset-building training in schools throughout Silicon Valley. These programs, which include the Spanish-language Los Dichos de la Casa as well as programs to support Chinese, Indian, Korean, and Vietnamese cultures, provide opportunities for parents from different cultures to build positive cultural identity in their own children and others from the same culture while building greater cultural competence for the entire class. For more information, contact Project Cornerstone at (408) 351-6482.
- Families with multiracial children can face unique challenges in helping their child develop a positive cultural identity. Many resources are available online for families to support multiracial children, including the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry at http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/multiracial_children and the Parenting by Strengths web site at http://www.parentingbystrengths.com/multiracial_children_and_youth/.
- Families who have adopted children from other cultures may face unique challenges in promoting positive cultural identity. Several resources exist to support multicultural families, including <http://transracial.adoption.com/interracial/racial-cultural-identity.html>, which offers parenting tips to help develop stable, happy children with a strong sense of cultural identity.

DECEMBER Asset of the Month: Family Support

If you or your organization can share ideas for promoting family support, please contact Elissa Miller at (408) 351-6425 or by email at Elissa@projectcornerstone.org.

About the Asset-a-Month Program

The Asset-a-Month program is an initiative of the Project Cornerstone public policy team, which contains representatives from local governments, agencies, and youth-serving organizations. The goals of the Asset-a-Month program are to help align adults throughout our diverse community in their efforts to promote positive youth development by fostering developmental assets. For more information about the Asset-a-Month program, contact Anne Ehresman, Project Cornerstone’s executive director, at (408) 351-6424 or Anne@projectcornerstone.org.