

ideas for parents

Easy Ways to Build Assets for and with Your Child

FAST FACTS

ASSET #13: Neighborhood Boundaries

Youth are more likely to grow up healthy when neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.

49%

of youth surveyed by Search Institute have this asset in their lives.*

What Are Assets?

Assets are 40 values, experiences, and qualities that help kids succeed. "Neighborhood boundaries" is one of six boundaries-and-expectations assets.

* Based on Search Institute surveys of 217,277 6th- to 12th-grade youth throughout the United States during the 1999-2000 school year.

Renewing the Neighborhood

"Banana Kelly," which refers to the banana-curved Kelly Street in the South Bronx of New York, was probably one of the last neighborhoods anyone wanted to live in. Empty buildings lined the rubble-strewn streets. The city considered it a hopeless neighborhood and the private sector refused to invest in it. At times people in the neighborhood would have to fill buckets from the fire hydrant because their water lines would get cut off.

Yet Harold DeRienzo had hope for the neighborhood. In fact, as everyone else was moving out, he moved in.

Harold began organizing the neighbors who were left. They learned each other's names and started doing things together. They held street cleanups and block parties, and started planting flowers. Slowly, the neighborhood began to change for the better. "Banana Kelly needs to be viewed as a vehicle for local empowerment," Harold says. "To retain a sense of community, people have to have a sense that they're affecting their own lives."

Helpful Hints

Four steps that make neighborhood boundaries easier:

1. **Get together with other parents and nonparents on your block. Discuss neighborhood boundaries.**
2. **Find three neighborhood boundaries that everyone agrees on.**
3. **Publish the boundaries in a one-page newsletter for everyone in the neighborhood.**
4. **Have contracts with other parents for things like no alcohol at teen parties.**



What does this have to do with neighborhood boundaries? Everything. When you ask people why they don't take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior in the neighborhood, they point to fear. They're afraid of the young people. They're afraid of the kids' parents. In essence, they're afraid of their neighbors.

It's easier to have neighborhood boundaries when people perceive their neighborhood as a caring community. You don't need to be a community organizer to help create a neighborhood where neighbors monitor young people's behavior. All you need to do is to start getting to know the people who live near you. Start with the ones who seem friendly. Get to know the children. Talk with their parents about boundaries they would like for their children in the neighborhood. Then together you can start building this asset.

Ideas for Neighborhood Boundaries

What are some neighborhood boundaries that you might want to consider?

- Respect each other's property.
- Report any suspicious activity.
- Supervise children younger than 16.
- End parties by 11:00 p.m.
- Talk to neighbors directly about concerns.

Connect, Then Decide

Before you decide on appropriate boundaries for your neighborhood, connect with other neighbors to get to know them. Try these simple ideas:

- **Hold a front-yard, neighborhood barbecue.**
- **Organize all the dog owners to take a walk together (with the dogs) once a week.**
- **Suggest a parent get-together. Ask older youth to supervise and play with the younger children.**
- **Contact your local police department and ask for help in having a block meeting to discuss safety.**

In a survey of 614 young people, 46% said it was very important for adults to report to parents when they saw their children doing something wrong.

More Help for Parents

Side by Side: Exploring Your Neighborhood through Intergenerational Activities by Matt Kaplan. This book contains activities to bring together young people and senior adults to learn about community and each other. (Published by MIG Communications.)

talk together

Questions to discuss with your child:

- *What are the boundaries of our neighborhood? How do you know?*
- *Which neighbors seem to notice what you do? How do you feel about that?*
- *How well do neighbors monitor young people in our neighborhood?*

Tips for Monitoring

Once neighbors agree on some common boundaries, encourage each other to:

- **Point out boundaries to youth. For example, if a neighbor hears young people swearing, everyone should support the neighbor saying, "We don't use that kind of language in our neighborhood."**
- **Call other neighbors about concerns or questions. Distribute a neighborhood directory with names, phone numbers, and addresses of neighbors interested in participating.**

FiNaL WoRD

"There's no such thing as other people's children."

—Hillary Rodham Clinton

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