

Connect the Dots to Form Community



The following suggestions from the Search Institute go a long way toward building the kind of community that cares for and supports children and families.

Parents Make the Connection to Community

- **Expect involvement** — Set expectations for a reasonable level of involvement in activities that match your family's values and priorities. If your children don't want to participate in some activities, determine what other activities might be appropriate substitutes.
 - **Match opportunities with interests** —As much as possible, find groups or activities that interest your children, increasing the likelihood that they will enjoy participation.
 - **Coordinate with other families** — Most kids relish the opportunity to be with friends. Plan for activities, camps or organizations in which your children can participate together.
 - **Connect with the leaders** — Speak with the leaders of your children's activities and thank them for their energy and commitment. Also feel free to give them feedback if your children aren't having a good experience, but always remember to work together as a team.
 - **Teach responsibility** — If your children aren't satisfied with the quality of an activity or program, what can they do about it?
- **Be creative** — Positive activities don't have to be formal activities. They may also include a "ritual" of kids in the neighborhood shooting hoops with some caring adults or a neighbor who teaches kids how to make different recipes each week (and then enjoys them—along with good conversation).
 - **Limit "screen time"** — The more time young people spend watching TV, playing video games or operating a computer, the less likely they are to be actively engaged in other constructive activities.
 - **Limit part-time jobs** — Limit teenagers' work hours to no more than 10-15 hours per week during the school year. Kids who work a lot tend to be less involved in other positive activities and have more trouble in school.
 - **Keep a balance** — Don't let any single activity become so all-consuming that it interferes with other important aspects of your children's lives. And don't get so busy doing activities that you and your children don't have time for each other—or just to relax.

continued...

Connect the Dots to Form Community (cont.)

Build Your Children's Team

- **Check in** — Talk with your children about the adult family members who are already important to them (aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc.) as well as adults in the community and other places they spend time (school, youth organization, faith community, etc.). If they don't know many adults, develop a plan together to expand their scope of contacts.
- **Talk with caring adults** — Encourage the adults you know and trust to spend more time with your children. Offer specific invitations for connections, based on mutual interests.
- **Thank those who take time** — Notice those adults who make special efforts to be there for your children. These may include teachers, youth leaders, extended family members, neighbors, music instructors, tutors, bus drivers and many other people in your children's lives.
- **Encourage connections** — Encourage your children to seek insights from other caring adults when they're facing important questions or decisions such as a job, higher education, faith, relationships or financial choices.
- **Connect in new places** — If your children don't have a strong network of caring adults, consider finding new activities and places they would enjoy where they could build new relationships. These may include after-school activities or community organizations.
- **Be smart** — Keep your children safe by asking about their adult friends. Be sure you are comfortable with how they treat your child, their values and how they spend time together. Be extremely cautious about letting your children spend one-on-one, private time with an adult who you do not know well.



Build Your Own Team

- **Strengthen your partner relationship** — Regularly set aside time to strengthen your relationship with your spouse or parenting partner. (If you do not have a partner, focus on strengthening other close relationships.) Be sure to check in every day, get away for a meal and conversation and take overnight retreats. And above all, continually encourage each other.
- **Build relationships in the neighborhood** — Take advantage of or create opportunities to get to know your neighbors, such as block or apartment parties. Plan or participate in events in ways that include and connect all generations.
- **Connect with other parents** — Get to know other parents with children the same ages as your children. Share your experiences and struggles, brainstorm solutions and in general just be there for each other. Get to know each other better by inviting them to share a meal (in your home or a restaurant) and help them become friends to both you and your children.
- **Stay involved during stressful times** — Stay connected and involved with supportive people and places for you and your family—particularly during times of stress or transition. This may include extended family, a faith community, a social network, a service organization or other important people and places.

Reprinted with permission from Search InstituteSM.
Copyright © 2005 by Search Institute, Minneapolis, MN; 800-888-7828;
www.search-institute.org. All rights reserved.