

ideas for parents

Easy Ways to Build Assets for and with Your Child

FAST FACTS

ASSET #40: Positive View of Personal Future

Youth are more likely to grow up healthy when they are optimistic about their personal future.

74%

*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. "Positive view of personal future" is one of four positive-identity assets.

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

A Reason to Hope

Viktor Frankl is a man who could have lost all hope.

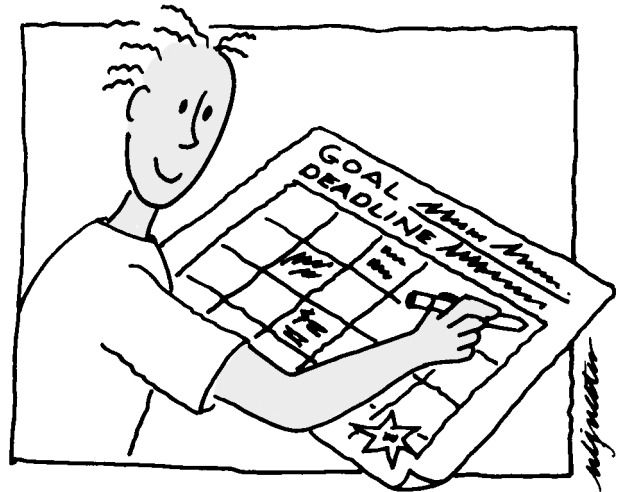
During World War II, Frankl was imprisoned in the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz. His father, mother, brother, and wife all died in Auschwitz or similar camps. But after living through three degrading years of torture, Frankl was released at the end of the war.

Frankl wrote *Man's Search for Meaning* based on his experience. In that book, he tells why he continued to be optimistic about the future despite the horrible, inhuman conditions he lived in.

His book continues to provide a source of hope for people in difficult, seemingly hopeless situations. His words of wisdom include:

- "There is nothing in the world, I venture to say, that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions, as the knowledge that there is meaning in one's life."
- "He [or she] who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*."
- "Everything can be taken from a [person] but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

Although very few if any of us will ever experience the horrifying life of a concentration camp, Frankl's experience reveals the importance of hope. An optimistic, hopeful attitude gives children the courage to venture forward, to make plans, to dream, and to live with the belief that they can accomplish their dreams.



time together

Three ways to help your child become more optimistic about the future:

1. *React positively when your child tells you her or his dreams—no matter how far-fetched or unreachable they may seem. Together choose one way to make a dream a reality.*
2. *Point out hopeful signs that you see when you're out and about, watching the television or a movie, or reading the newspaper. Encourage your child to do the same. One family clips articles about good things people are doing to improve the world.*
3. *Think about your own hope and manage your own mental health. You'll be a role model for your child.*

Think and Do

At home focus on solutions instead of problems. Identify areas of hope in difficult situations. Be creative, adjust, and be flexible as you create new ways to deal with old problems.

A Checklist for Developing a Positive Outlook



People who have hope are people willing to tackle new challenges. They keep moving forward because they expect good things to happen. Dr. Ann Kaiser Stearns, professor of psychology and the author of *Coming Back: Rebuilding Lives after Crisis and Loss*, says there are four important ways of thinking in order to have a positive attitude:

1. When things don't go your way, that's okay.
2. You can have control over most of the circumstances in life that can cause you unhappiness.
3. You can depend on yourself.
4. The past doesn't define you, but your attitudes, actions, and values do.

In research on people who overcome difficult odds and have hope for the future, she found they have a number of traits. Check those your child has:

- Your child looks for inspirational role models.
- Your child takes advantage of opportunities.
- Your child dares to dream but is realistic about those dreams.
- Your child can search relentlessly for answers when obstacles appear.
- Your child thinks about the future more often than about the past.

Quick Tip:
Make a conscious choice
to be optimistic.

talk together

- Questions to discuss with your child:
- What excites you about the future? What scares you?
 - What age do you think is the perfect age? Why?
 - Why does it matter how we feel about the future?

More Help for Parents

The Optimistic Child by Martin E. P. Seligman et al. This book provides useful information and good examples for teaching children to think positively. (Published by Harper Perennial.)

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“In the presence of strong values and of ambition, [optimism] is the tool that makes both individual accomplishment and social justice possible.”

—Martin E. P. Seligman, Ph.D.

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