

Make a World of Difference

50 Asset-Building Activities
to Help Teens Explore Diversity

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Introduction: Exploring Issues of Diversity— The Global Village

On December 26, 2004, a tsunami of enormous size hit Asia and Africa. More than 200,000 people from more than 40 different countries were killed. Many lessons followed, but one stood out: We are all in this world together. When natural disaster or human tragedy strikes, the realization that we all share this world becomes magnified. We see the pain and suffering of others, and it becomes evident that we all belong to one group: humankind. Economic status, gender, skin color, sexual orientation, physical appearance, ability, and age become irrelevant in such times of crisis. Governments and citizens from countries all over the world poured out their love and compassion for the victims of this massive disaster by providing whatever support they could to the survivors. We became united under the shared purpose of providing relief to our suffering brothers and sisters.

The challenge before us is to learn how to live as a global village in the absence of a disaster. Overcoming this challenge begins with sowing seeds of awareness and understanding of the diverse and ever-changing world we live in. Our ability to thrive as a human species depends on our ability to live in unity while living with *diversity*—the many differences in ethnicity, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, religious practice, appearance, and other characteristics that make up our rich and exciting world.

Why Explore Diversity Issues?

The world our young people will live in as adults will differ vastly from the world of the adults currently educating them. With the click of a mouse, young people can be anywhere in the world. Such instant connection was not the case for most current educators and parents during their own youth. As caring adults, we are therefore charged with training our young people to participate responsibly in a much more global culture. This requires our young people to be aware of and comfortable with the diverse religious practices, genders, ages, ethnicities, appearances, socioeconomic status, sexual orientations, and varying ability levels of all individuals.

All of us, young and old alike, enter society with a store of prior knowledge, closely aligned with our individual and cultural backgrounds, and that knowledge influences how we interact with others. We behave based on how we are raised and, understandably, hold a variety of beliefs and biases about other people. As a facilitator of the activities in this book, you will need to be aware of your own cultural background and biases and let young people know that these cultural influences are common to us all. Facilitators and young people can learn together about different ideas and ways of thinking, with the far-

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reaching goal of fostering respect, acceptance, and understanding of those whose lives are not like ours. Although every young person grows up within a cultural context, he or she is shaped over the years by other influences, such as education and social interactions. Education can help young people develop both an awareness of and respect for diversity and cultural differences.

Learning to understand and value differences takes time. It is a comprehensive process that develops like a strong structure—beginning first with a good foundation. Successfully implementing cultural competence and diversity education in a school system or community takes sincere commitment on the part of school administrators, teachers, family members, and community leaders. These decision makers must believe diversity awareness is important for our 21st-century young people, and must demonstrate that belief with strong leadership dedicated to developing an effective education plan. We have a responsibility to provide our young people with the skill sets necessary to become productive, responsible citizens—in their community, nation, and world.

Cultural Competence and Developmental Assets

All of the activities presented here are based on Cultural Competence, Asset 34 of Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets™. Developmental Assets are the positive qualities, skills, experiences, and opportunities that are critical elements in the healthy development of children and young people. Based on more than four decades of research on human development, these assets paint a picture of the positive things young people need to grow into competent, capable, caring, healthy adults. See page 9 for a complete list of the Developmental Assets.

The 40 assets are divided into eight categories. The first four asset categories focus on external structures, relationships, and activities that create a positive environment for young people:

Support—Young people need to be surrounded by people who love, care for, appreciate, and accept them. They need to know they belong and are not alone.

Empowerment—Young people need to feel valued and valuable. This happens when young people feel safe, when they believe they are liked and respected, and when they contribute to their families and communities.

Boundaries and Expectations—Young people need the positive influence of peers and adults who encourage them to be and do their best. Young people also need clear rules about appropriate behavior, and consistent, reasonable consequences for breaking those rules.

Constructive Use of Time—Young people need opportunities—outside of school—to learn and develop new skills and interests, and to spend enjoyable time interacting with other young people and adults.

The next four categories reflect internal values, skills, and beliefs that young people also need to fully engage with and function in the world around them:

Commitment to Learning—Young people need a variety of learning experiences, including the desire for academic success, a sense of the lasting importance of learning, and a belief in their own abilities.

Positive Values—Young people need to develop strong guiding values or principles, including caring about others, having high standards for personal character, and believing in protecting their own well-being.

Social Competencies—Young people need to develop the skills to interact effectively with others, to make difficult decisions and choices, and to cope with new situations.

Positive Identity—Young people need to believe in their own self-worth, to feel they have control over the things that happen to them, and to have a sense of purpose in life as well as a positive view of the future.

The Power of Assets

On one level, the 40 Developmental Assets represent common wisdom about the kinds of positive experiences and characteristics young people need and deserve. But their value extends further. Surveys of more than 200,000 students in grades 6 through 12 reveal that assets are powerful positive influences on adolescent behavior. Regardless of gender, racial/ethnic background, socioeconomic status, grade in school, type of community, or geographic location, these assets help protect young people from many different problem behaviors. Furthermore, young people who report having more assets are consistently more likely to be successful in school, be leaders, resist danger, maintain good health, value diversity, and demonstrate other indicators of thriving.

About This Book

M*ake a World of Difference* attempts to build understanding and awareness around issues of cultural competence. It is created for use in a community or school setting with young people ages 12 to 18. You can use the activities with stable groups of young people that meet regularly over time, or with migratory populations whose attendance may vary. In a school setting, you can teach these activities as a course or use them to supplement your curriculum. You can also incorporate the activities into after-school programs, leadership programs, juvenile detention centers, in-school suspension programs, faith-based organizations, and community-based organizations.

Each idea in this book provides information about the focus of the activity, materials you will need, suggested time frames, directions on how to conduct the activity, and discussion questions to ask the group at the end of the activity. Each activity touches on three other assets (in addition to Asset 34, Cultural Competence), which are included under “Additional Assets.” Sample scripts are also included in **bold** to give facilitators suggestions for speaking to participants. Feel free to adjust these scripts as necessary.

This book is organized into three sections. The activities in section 1, Personal and Environmental Awareness Activities, are intended for people who have very little exposure to and awareness about the issues surrounding each topic. In section 2, Skill-Building Activities, the activities are intended for participants who are beyond the exposure stage and are interested in building skills around a particular topic. Finally, section 3, Practice Activities, gives participants opportunities to try out new, culturally competent methods for expression and relationship building while having the support of group discussions.

How to Use This Activity Book

Although the activities are presented sequentially, you can use whatever activity is appropriate for achieving your intended purpose, as each activity can stand alone. However, for a weekend retreat or intensive training on a particular diversity issue, a number of activities can be combined to create an extended workshop agenda. Most activities can be done in less than an hour.

Before beginning an activity, share the following information with participants to give them a frame of reference for the work you are about to undertake. If the group will meet regularly, you need only read it once:

The world around us is changing—fast. We need to be much more prepared than past generations were to be citizens of a diverse, global community. We hope these activities will help us develop our skills as competent global citizens, able to understand many of the issues surrounding diversity and culture. Our goal as a group is to

40 Developmental Assets™ for Adolescents (Ages 12–18)

Search InstituteSM has identified the following building blocks of healthy development that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.

ASSET TYPE		ASSET NAME AND DEFINITION
External Assets	SUPPORT	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Family support—Family life provides high levels of love and support. Positive family communication—Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents. Other adult relationships—Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults. Caring neighborhood—Young person experiences caring neighbors. Caring school climate—School provides a caring, encouraging environment. Parent involvement in schooling—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.
	EMPOWERMENT	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Community values youth—Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth. Youth as resources—Young people are given useful roles in the community. Service to others—Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week. Safety—Young person feels safe at home, at school, and in the neighborhood.
	BOUNDARIES & EXPECTATIONS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Family boundaries—Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts. School boundaries—School provides clear rules and consequences. Neighborhood boundaries—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior. Adult role models—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior. Positive peer influence—Young person's best friends model responsible behavior. High expectations—Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.
	CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Creative activities—Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts. Youth programs—Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community. Religious community—Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution. Time at home—Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.
Internal Assets	COMMITMENT TO LEARNING	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Achievement motivation—Young person is motivated to do well in school. School engagement—Young person is actively engaged in learning. Homework—Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day. Bonding to school—Young person cares about her or his school. Reading for pleasure—Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.
	POSITIVE VALUES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Caring—Young person places high value on helping other people. Equality and social justice—Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty. Integrity—Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs. Honesty—Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy." Responsibility—Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility. Restraint—Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.
	SOCIAL COMPETENCIES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Planning and decision making—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices. Interpersonal competence—Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills. Cultural competence—Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds. Resistance skills—Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations. Peaceful conflict resolution—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.
	POSITIVE IDENTITY	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Personal power—Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me." Self-esteem—Young person reports having a high self-esteem. Sense of purpose—Young person reports that "my life has a purpose." Positive view of personal future—Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

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