

1. Social Development

We are all social creatures. Understanding who we are as people - our positive traits and the areas that need work - enables us to change and grow. Good relationships and communication skills help us to develop and maintain healthy relationships. Understanding our culture and that of others in our family and community enables us to develop an appreciation of our past and value our future.

Personal Development

1. Picture Yourself

Have your youth cut out pictures, words and phrases from a magazine that describe how they see themselves or things that are important to them. Make a collage with all of the pictures and words. Talk about their choices and what they mean. Talk about what kind of self images communicated by the pictures/words they've chosen. **Levels: 1 2 3**

2. Watch The Self-Talk

If you hear your youth making negative comments about themselves ("I'm so stupid," "I can't do anything right"), call attention to it. Ask them what they mean, or challenge what they're saying. Help them remember things they can do well by talking about or looking at old photos. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

3. Learning About Yourself

Play "The Un-game" with your child (can be purchased at most toy stores). This game asks players questions about themselves and there are no wrong answers. Be prepared to share things about yourself as you play. **Levels: 1 2 3**

4. Say It Carefully

Watch how you praise your child. Statements like "You got all your spelling words right -you're such a good girl!" can teach kids that we only value them for what they do well.

Instead, try to emphasize the importance of doing your best and feeling good about yourself with statements like "You worked really hard on those spelling words" or "It looks like you really enjoyed making this drawing." **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

Teachable Moment

Unfortunately, many youths in our society today do self-destructive things. When your youth comes home with a story about how someone in their school tried to commit suicide or overdosed on drugs, talk about the incident. Ask your youth what they think caused that person to act that way. Talk about the idea of self-esteem and how people with low self-esteem may

sometimes do self-destructive things because they don't think they are worth much as a person. Talk with your youth about their self-esteem, and ask how they would get help if feeling alone, sad, overwhelmed, etc.

5.

6. Write It Down

Sit down with your youth and help them make a list of their strengths and the things they do well. Have them write these things down on a notecard and keep it some place safe. When they are feeling down, they can pull out the card and be reminded of their good points and the things they do well. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

7. I Have A Dream

Ask your youth what some of their dreams are. Ask them about short-term goals ("I want to sing in the church choir") as well as long-term goals ("I'd like to be a writer"). Talk about the strengths they have now that could help them meet their goals. Share some of your own dreams for the future. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

Tip

Help your youth discover activities they enjoy doing and can have success in. For some youth it might be sports, others may like music, drawing, or pottery. Give them opportunities to participate in things they can be good at, both at home and in the community. This helps youth uncover and build on strengths and talents.

Cultural Awareness

1. A Vocal History

If your youth came from a different biological family, preserving their sense of heritage and where they came from may be difficult. To encourage them to remember where they came from, have them sit down with a tape recorder and reminisce about family holidays, meals, trips or other experiences. Bring the tape out from time to time (possibly on their birthday) for them to listen to. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

2. Language Lessons

If you speak a language besides English, speak it at home and teach it to your youth if they show an interest. If your youth comes from another family and speaks a different language, ask them to teach you some words and phrases as a way of building ties with them and encouraging pride in their cultural heritage. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

3. Food As Culture

If your youth comes from a culture different from your own, periodically let them enjoy

“traditional” meals from their culture at restaurants or in your home. With any youth, explore the foods of different cultures by eating out at restaurants that serve ethnic foods.

Levels: 1 2 3 4

4. Clothes As Culture

As you watch TV with your youth or go to events where there are many people, talk about the different kinds of clothes people may wear to represent their racial or ethnic background. If your child is of a different culture than yours, let them explore wearing clothes that are identified with their culture. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

5. Toys As Culture

If you have saved toys from your childhood, bring them out to show your children. Talk about their meaning to you and how they may be specific to your culture. **Levels: 1 2**
Through friends, libraries, TV, museums, or the Internet, help your child learn about toys from other cultures. **Levels: 1 2**

6. Friends Around The World

Make friends with people from other cultures who live in your neighborhood or work with you. Invite them to your home or go to their home as a way to introduce your youth to people from other cultures. Let your youth celebrate a holiday or go to a place of worship with a friend or family member from another culture. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

7. Faith As Culture

Places of worship can be another way to expose your youth to other cultures. Consider visiting a place of worship different than your own to see how other groups express their faith. Congregations of ethnically mixed people can provide a good demonstration of how different people can be united by something like faith. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

8. Holidays As Culture

Observe "traditional" holidays of your own or your youth's culture (if different). Help your youth find information (in books, on the Internet) about how a certain holiday is celebrated if they don't know. Try to incorporate food, activities, and music from that holiday into your celebration. If your child is of a different background than yours and feels comfortable, let them "lead" some part of the celebration. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

9. Exploring Other Cultures

Take day or weekend trips with your youth to areas that are different than where you live. You might visit a town that is ethnically different, rural instead of urban, poor instead of

wealthy, large instead of small, etc. Talk about the differences between the places you are

visiting and your "home town." **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

10. Economic Culture

Keep in mind that culture can include economic factors as well. Spend a day volunteering at a soup kitchen or working in a housing project with your youth to expose them to the challenges faced by those living in poverty. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

Tip

As parents, we must admit to ourselves when we are using stereotypes and then work on it. We can start by avoiding labels like "foster, black, short, fat, gay," etc. when referring to people.

11. Confronting Racism

Magazine articles, news stories, movies, or TV shows that deal with issues of racism can provide good opportunities to talk about these issues with your youth. After reading or watching them, help youth think about all the ways that racial prejudice can be expressed. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

12. Stereotypes And Labels

If your youth uses a racial slur or stereotype, challenge their thinking by asking what they mean by this term. Re-educate them about how labels and stereotypes can hurt people. Talk about how we limit our ability to know other people if we judge others only by appearance (color, size, height, etc.). Ask your youth how they would feel if someone judged them only on the basis of their appearance. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

Parent Quote

"As parents, we don't always know how to give kids the right tool to recognize and deal with discrimination. We may need to get some training to learn these tools."

13. Dealing With Discrimination

If you or your youth experience any type of discrimination, talk as a family about the situation. Talk about the feelings that come up when someone discriminates against you and use it as an opportunity to teach the importance of not acting that way towards them. Teach your youth how to handle discrimination when they encounter it. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

Teachable Moment

If your youth does something that shows a racial prejudice, deal with it in a way that shows it is a serious matter. For example, if your youth calls another youth a racial slur, try to get together with your youth, the other youth and their parents to discuss the incident. Help your youth see that it is unacceptable and hurts other people.

14. Embracing Our Cultural Heritage

Youth who are multiethnic or multiracial need to begin learning about their mixed heritage as early as possible. Explore this through conversation, books, frequent contact with people who share their heritage, and discussion about racism they may encounter and tools to deal with it. For youth who resist looking at this important piece of their identity because they don't want to appear "different", role-model by researching, learning about, and celebrating your own heritage, whatever it may be. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

Communication

1. Communication Charades

Play a game at the dinner table. Ask everyone to take turns saying a phrase (such as "Don't you look nice today" or "What a good idea!") with different facial expressions and in different tones of voice. Show how the same words can come across as very sincere, sarcastic, rude, angry, etc., depending on your tone of voice and body language. Talk about how communication is made up of words, tone, and body language. **Levels: 1 2 3** Playing a family game of charades is always a fun way to focus on nonverbal communication skills. **Levels: 1 2 3**

2. Basic Communication Skills

Teach children to become better listeners by reading them a story and asking them questions about it (where was the treasure hidden, etc.). **Level: 1** Ask older youth a few questions and after they respond, repeat back to them the answers they gave you. Role-model by staying quiet while they are answering and maintain eye contact. **Levels: 1 2 3** Learning not to interrupt conversation can be taught by practicing with youth to wait until the speaker completes a sentence or thought, then saying "Pardon me, or excuse me." **Levels: 1 2**

3. Getting Clarification/Asking Open-Ended Questions

When your youth says something to you about how their day went, rephrase what they said to you and ask for more information. For example, if your youth says "I hate school, I'm never going back," try saying, "It sounds like something really bad must have happened at school today. Can you tell me about it?" Tell them that you are getting clarification and information to understand them better. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

Watch Yourself In Action

If your youth is having trouble with some part of communication (like telling someone they are angry or saying how they feel about something), have them practice in front of a mirror or with a video camera. Ask the youth what they think about how they're coming across (too negative or too indecisive a tone of voice, respectful, non-blaming of the other person, attaching a positive comment to a negative, etc.) and have them practice to improve their skills. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

4. A Pat On The Back

Have a "complimentary dinner" some night at the table. Have each person give a compliment to the person on his or her right (or to everyone). Talk about whether the compliments sounded sincere and about how the person getting the compliment reacted. Have youth practice just saying "thank you" when someone gives them a compliment instead of just playing it down. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

5. You've Got The Look

Teach your youth about the different "looks" or cues you might give them when they are behaving inappropriately. Tell them that when you are in public, you don't want to embarrass them by saying something, but you don't want them to embarrass you or themselves, either, so if their behavior is out of line, you will give them a certain look or signal so they know to stop. **Levels: 1 2 3**

6. There's More Than One Way To Communicate

If you have a youth that has a hard time expressing emotions, write notes to them. Either sit near them and write notes back and forth about how they're feeling, what's wrong, etc., or leave a note in their room or write back and forth to each other in a journal. Writing can be less threatening because tone of voice and eye contact are not involved. It also allows us to think through what we want to say before we "say" it. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

7. A Message For You

If your youth doesn't respond well to verbal directions to do a chore or take care of something, give it to them in writing. Put a chalkboard in their room or in the kitchen. Write down what you need them to do each day or week and train them to "check their messages." You won't have to hear the complaints or watch the eye-rolling when they see what they need to do. Ask them to leave messages for you too. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

8. Practice Makes Perfect

Before your youth enters a new social setting (first day of school, party at a friend's house, meeting new people), coach your youth on how they might act. Role-play the situation with them and talk about their eye contact, body language and words they use. Youth who are especially shy may need ideas for things to talk about, like the weather or a current event. With young children, you can act out the situation using dolls, action figures or animals. This is important to do so that youth can feel comfortable about what they'll say and how they'll act. **Levels: 1 2 3**

9. Talking To Different People

At the dinner table, ask your youth what they would say if they needed some information from a policeman vs. a preacher vs. their best friend. Emphasize how it's appropriate to communicate differently with different people depending on their role and the relationship we have with them. **Levels: 1 2**

10. Communications With The Teacher

Consider taking your youth along to a parent-teacher conference, especially if the youth is having problems in the classroom. Help your youth hear the teacher's feedback and talk to them about possible solutions to the problems they are having. This

develops assertiveness and teaches the youth proper ways to communicate with a teacher. **Levels: 1 2 3**

11. Communication On The Job

Take advantage of youth employment and volunteer programs in your community. Not only will your youth learn new job skills, they will also gain experience communicating with someone in an employer role. **Levels: 2 3**

12. Communication For An Interview

Before your youth goes for a job interview, conduct a mock interview where you each take turns playing the employer and employee. Point out where your youth could improve communication through eye contact, not using slang, body posture, etc., and have your youth do the same for you! **Levels: 3 4**

13. Using Communication Tools Correctly

Before allowing your youth to answer the phone in your home, go over with them what you want them to say when they answer, what to say if the caller asks for you and you're not home, how to take a message, etc. Tell them what kind of information they should never give out to someone they don't know (address, credit card information, whether they are alone).

Role-play answering different types of calls until they can do it correctly. Make sure to demonstrate how to handle sales people on the phone. Go over similar information for usage of e-mail and the Internet. **Levels: 1 2 3**

14. Making A Request Develops Assertiveness

Youth often try to "hint" at what they want, or sometimes they just expect you to read their minds. For example, they might say, "Boy that cake looks good." and expect you to offer them some instead of saying, "May I please have a piece of cake?" If they do this, tell them you won't respond until they make a clear, direct request. **Levels: 1 2**

15. Learning To Negotiate

It's important for youth to learn to negotiate with others. If you sense that your youth feels upset about something they've been asked to do, or the time frame they need to do it in, teach them how to politely ask if something can be changed. For example, if you've told them to go clean up their room in the middle of their favorite TV show and they are upset, suggest that they ask you (nicely) if they can do it right after the show. If it's okay with you, let them do it the way they are suggesting. Explain that while it's fine to ask, not everything is negotiable - sometimes they will just have to do what you say when you say it. **Levels: 1 2 3**

16. Managing Conflict

When siblings are fighting, it is often a good idea to let them work out the problem on their own. However, this is not possible when the conflict becomes too intense or even violent. If you need to step in, send each youth to a separate area for a specified time, then bring them back together to discuss the problem. Help them think of all the ways they could solve their problem, even silly ways (flip a coin, pick a number between 1 and 10, let each get their way for a certain amount of time). **Levels: 1 2 3**

17. After A Conflict

After a conflict involving anyone in your home, make sure that everyone (adults too) apologizes to each other. You might want to do a "group hug" or "high-fives" as a way of affirming that you're still a family, even if there are fights and disagreements. If someone has damaged or destroyed someone else's property during a conflict, give that person the chance to make things right by replacing the object with their allowance or doing chores for the other person. If the conflict was with a teacher, school mate, or someone outside the home, help the youth to write a letter to apologize and take responsibility for their part in the conflict.

Levels: 1 2 3 4

18. Talking About Sensitive Topics

Sometimes it is difficult to discuss conflicts or sensitive topics face to face. Use time spent driving in the car or working on a puzzle with your youth to discuss difficult issues - a more casual atmosphere may help your youth to be more open. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

19. Family Meetings Address Conflict

Hold regular family meetings where members have a chance to talk about the things that are stressing them out. Ask what family members are upset about and how members can do things differently to be less upsetting. Have a policy that family members can say whatever they want to, as long as they say it in a respectful manner. Make sure to end meetings on a positive note by having each member say something positive about the others. Order pizza or have popcorn to make the meeting a special occasion. **Levels: 1 2 3**

20. What Is Anger

Many dramas on TV or video show people fighting, destroying things, or otherwise acting out their anger. As you watch one of these shows with your youth, talk about anger (what makes you angry, what makes them angry, how each of you tends to handle it, etc.). Talk about (and role-model for your kids) some of the ways that people can handle anger appropriately (counting to ten, giving yourself a time out, shooting hoops, running, writing in a journal, working with clay, pounding your fists into a pillow) and help them think of ways that would make sense for them. **Levels: 1 2 3**

Relationships

1. Types Of Healthy Relationships

Draw an "Eco-Map" with your youth. Put their name in the center of a small circle. Around the circle, draw a series of circles that represent all the relationships they have. Write the names or roles of those closest to them in the circle that goes around their name, then do the same for all the other circles moving outward. For example, in the circle around their name, you might list the names of family members. The next circle might have names of their friends, the next their teachers, then their caseworkers, therapist, pastor, etc. Talk about the relationships they have with each person or group of people, (how "close" they are, how much personal information they share, how much they trust each person). Ask your youth who they consider to be part of their "support system" - people they would go to for help with a problem. Let the youth lead you in this exercise - what you think about who is closest to them might not be what they think.

Levels: 1 2 3 4

2. Characteristics Of Healthy Relationships

As you watch TV programs or videos that show people in friendships or dating relationships, talk about the qualities of a good friend, what's "healthy" in a good relationship, etc. Ask your youth to point out the things that people might do in the programs/videos that are not healthy (manipulate, make you feel guilty, lie to you, etc.), as well as the positive things.

Levels: 1 2 3 4

Tip

One important way that children learn about healthy relationships is by

seeing them in action. Talk to your youth about what makes your friendship or your marriage work well. Tell them about qualities you admire in friends or your spouse and share how you handled difficulties in a positive way.

3. Handling An Unhealthy Relationship

As you watch TV programs with your youth that show people in "unhealthy" relationships, talk about how characters in these programs handle each relationship and other options they could try. Discuss what your youth could do if they found themselves in an unhealthy relationship (get counseling with the person involved, get a restraining order, end the relationship). You may want to tell them about an experience you had with an unhealthy relationship and what you did or wished you had done to resolve it.

Levels: 1 2 3

4. How Would You Feel?

When your youth is distressed about a negative interaction with another person, ask them to "act it out" with you once they have cooled off. Have the youth play the part of the other person, while you pretend to be the youth. After role-playing, ask your youth how the other person may have felt and why they have behaved as they did. This teaches

youth empathy and how to see things from another person's viewpoint. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

5. Practice For Dating

Take your youth out on a practice "date" and model how a person taking them out should behave, as well as how your youth should behave. Dads can talk to their daughters about how a boy should behave on a date; moms can talk to their sons about what a girl should/should not do too. **Levels: 1 2 3**

6. Dating Advice

Have older siblings talk to younger youth about the "real world of dating," including what's appropriate behavior and what's not. **Levels: 2 3**

7. Setting Boundaries

Teach your children that it is okay to ask for more information from an adult. Youth who have been in the foster care system have usually had many different adults they don't know well involved in their life (caseworkers, transportation people, etc.). If someone they don't know calls or approaches them, let them know they can ask for identification or call you or another trusted person to check things out. **Levels: 1 2 3**

8. Handling Personal Questions

If your youth comes from another home, talk with them about what they can say to people who ask if you're their "real" parent or other personal questions. Teach them that it is a good thing not to tell their life story to everyone they meet and that they do not have to answer personal questions. Role-play different situations with them so that they feel comfortable with how they will respond. Help them to see that some information is private; model this for them by not telling them about your personal troubles, marital problems, etc.
Levels: 1 2 3

9. Don't Touch Me!

Sometimes youth who have been in the foster care system have had bad experiences with physical touch. If you have a youth who won't engage in physical interaction, start with non-threatening kinds of touch. Young children can play games involving touch like "Patty Cake" or "Red Rover." Older youth might be receptive to "high-fives." Youth who won't give or receive hugs might need to start with handshakes. **Levels: 1 2 3**

10. Learning About Physical Boundaries

Some youth in the foster care system have poor physical boundaries - they'll hug or touch everyone or do it inappropriately. If this sounds like your youth, start by sharing

with them how it makes you feel. "I feel uncomfortable when you hug me that way." Enlist the help of other people in their life (teachers, youth group workers, etc.) to help give feedback and set limits with your youth. For instance, the teacher might need to tell your youth he can't hug her, but he can shake her hand. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

Tip

Many times kids will tell us about situations where they believe they were a "victim" or where someone "wronged" them. We may easily see how the youth's behavior led to the negative interactions, but they may be totally unaware. Try asking them what they wanted to accomplish in the situations and what they could have said or done differently that might have led to a different outcome. Help them see that they are not always just a helpless victim, but that their behavior plays a part in how others treat them, and that by changing their behavior, they might get the results they want.

11. Maintaining A Personal Support System

Talk with your youth about different scenarios where they might need help (finding housing or a job, an unplanned pregnancy, a religious question, an illness). Ask them who they could go to for help in each of these situations. Give them a small notebook or address book to write down names and addresses of people in their personal support system. If they don't know who is part of their support system, help them think through the people that have given them help at different times. **Levels: 3 4**

12. Being Part Of A Community

As part of drawing an Eco-Map with your youth (Relationship Activity #1), have them write down all the different groups or communities of which they are a part of (school, church, clubs, etc.). Ask them to list some of the benefits they get from each group. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**

13. Leisure Time

Encourage your youth to participate in sports or other hobbies. If a youth joins your family later in life and doesn't have any hobbies, talk with them about what they like to do or something they have always wanted to try. Help them look in the newspaper or on the Internet for community classes or groups they might want to join. If they're really having trouble finding something, offer to take a photography, pottery, dance, or other class with them in the evening or during the summer. **Levels: 1 2 3 4**