

The Five Promises (America's Promise)

PROMISE ONE: CARING ADULTS

Communities need to provide all young people with sustained adult relationships through which they experience support, care and guidance. Caring and connectedness within and beyond the family are powerful factors in protecting young people from negative behaviors and creating strong positive qualities.

Caring Adults: Ongoing relationships with caring adults — parents, mentors, tutors or coaches.

Ideally, youth develop sustained connections with:

- Parents or other caregivers.
- Extended family members.
- Neighbors and other adults youth see in their daily lives.
- Adults who spend time with youth through schools and programs, including coaches, teachers, mentors, child care workers, youth workers, and employers.

PROMISE TWO: SAFE PLACES

A safe place with constructive activities gives youth an alternative to street corners, gangs and other harmful environments. A safe place nurtures young people's skills and interests, enriches their academic performance and gives them opportunities to contribute to their communities.

Safe Places

Safe places with structured activities during non-school hours.

Young people need structure, and they need to be physically and emotionally safe. Providing safe places and structured activities has many benefits to both young people and society. This promise can:

- Connect youth to principled and caring adults.
- Nurture young people's skills and capacities, including social skills, vocational interests and civic responsibility.
- Protect youth from violence and other dangerous or negative influences.
- Create a peer group in which youth exert a positive influence on each other.
- Provide opportunities for children and youth to contribute to their community and society.
- Enrich young people's academic performance and educational commitment.

Research consistently affirms the value of these opportunities. Yet far too few children and adolescents have ongoing access to this critical support.

PROMISE THREE: A HEALTHY START

Today, too few young people are experiencing the level of support in their communities that will ensure a healthy future. A healthy start includes making sure caregivers and young people have access to the services and opportunities they need to be healthy.

A Healthy Start: A healthy start and future.

To many, "a healthy start" focuses on what children need before they start school: prenatal care, immunizations and school readiness. Indeed, these early years are crucial. But we must also think about this promise more broadly as "a healthy start" for adulthood. The following are necessary to ensure that children grow up healthy:

- Accessible and affordable health insurance that covers regular checkups; eye, ear and dental exams; and treatment of illness.
- Health education focusing on risk behaviors such as violence and alcohol, drug and tobacco use.
- Adequate nutrition and exercise.

Too few young people have access to this support in their communities. We need to provide all of them with a healthy start.

PROMISE FOUR: MARKETABLE SKILLS

Marketable skills enable young people to prepare for employment in the 21st Century. Young people must master basic academic and analytical skills, learn workplace etiquette, and know how to use technology, such as computers and the Internet. America's Promise partners help youth develop these essential career skills.

Marketable Skills: Marketable skills through effective education.

Employers increasingly need workers who can think, learn new skills rapidly, work in teams, and solve problems creatively. Yet too few youth, whether college bound or not, have these qualities. In many cases, even basic work skills are lacking.

Making a successful transition from school to work is a critical milestone in the youth development journey. Yet significant shifts in both the workplace and the skills workers need today make it increasingly more difficult for young people to make this transition successfully.

There are many important qualities, skills and competencies that young people need to be successful and productive workers. Among these are:

- A foundation in basic skills, such as reading, writing, mathematics, science, technology and communication.
- Thinking skills, such as creativity, decision-making, problem-solving and reasoning.
- Personal attitudes and qualities, such as integrity, responsibility and self-motivation.

Particular supports are needed to enhance skills and readiness for work. These include school reform efforts (to ensure that students are engaged in relevant, challenging and interesting learning), and education about economics and business, internships, work-study, vocational and career counseling, and on-the-job experience that exposes students to career opportunities and job skills. Such efforts prepare young people to be valuable workers throughout their lives.

PROMISE FIVE: OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE

Young volunteers have higher self-esteem, perform better in school, build leadership skills, and learn how to solve community problems. America's Promise partners are providing numerous opportunities for youth to help their communities.

Opportunities to Serve: Opportunities to give back through community service.

It's time to see young people as part of the solution, not part of the problem. Yet even though youth are more likely than adults to volunteer, fewer than half of all young people consistently serve others. A result is that they miss this powerful opportunity for growth.

Giving children and adolescents opportunities to serve others is an important strategy in shaping America's future. Though school-based community service has received the most attention, there are many different avenues through which youth can contribute to their communities. These include:

- Religious congregations
- Neighborhood teams
- Service clubs
- Family volunteering

- Youth organizations
- Schools

Though service by youth is often "packaged" as a single program run by an organization or social institution, promoting service as a lifelong commitment is enhanced when youth participate at many ages and through multiple avenues, and when opportunity is given to reflect on the act of service -- hence, the term "service-learning."

With appropriate training and support, young people can perform hundreds of different types of service in their communities. An emerging body of research suggests that service-learning experiences enhance self-esteem, a sense of personal competence and efficacy, engagement with school, and social responsibility for others. But remember that youth are much less likely to volunteer if they are not asked.

Source: America's Promise

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