ESI Expanded Success Initiative

Connect with Kids
Educate the mind and the heart

Student Activity

Building Social Capital: Valuing Yourself and Others

In the video, Jeisson Santana talks openly about how his school's ESI Peer Mentoring program changed his life. He explains that mentors "guided me, helped bring me out of my depression state ... my confidence increased ... [the mentors] actually changed my life in a way that is more positive." What Jeisson is referring to is *the value of having connections with others* – what experts call **"social capital."** Jeisson found that he was able to lean on his social network (mentors and peers) in times of need; today he realizes he can also provide value by helping others in his school and community.

Consider these Self-Reflection and Discussion Questions:

- Jeisson says that when he started high school, he couldn't handle the pressure of classes and meeting new people. Have you (or someone you know) ever felt this way? Who can you turn to if you feel stressed, anxious or sad? Is there at least one friend or adult with whom you feel safe and confident to ask for help?

- Have you (or someone you know) ever had a "life-changing" experience? It could be something big (such as moving, learning to play a sport, having a sister or brother) or it could be something smaller that made a positive impression on you (a friend visiting you when you were sick; a classmate whom you don't know inviting you sit with him or her at lunch; a compliment from a coach or teacher). What experiences have changed you for the better? How would you describe the change?

Student Activity

Building Social Capital

Part of building social capital is having the self-confidence to reach out to other people and make valuable connections, friendships and mentoring relationships. A first step in building self-confidence is identifying and understanding your strengths as well as areas where you could improve.

In the exercise below, **fill in the blanks to take an "inventory" of yourself**. Base your answers on how *you* see yourself, not the opinions of others.

1. My favorite quality about myself is: _____.
2. My least favorite quality about myself is:_____.
3. A few of the things I am good at are: _____
   _____.
4. A few things I am not good at are: _____
   _____.
5. A school subject in which I would like to improve is: _____.
6. A school subject I which I succeed is: _____.
7. Friends often turn to me for help with: _____.

Social capital includes your "social network" -- the group of people with whom you connect. This can include friends, family, teachers, mentors, coaches, classmates, people at your church or other faith-based organizations, people with whom you work, and anyone whose connection you value and who values you, too. According to researchers at Harvard University, when students build social capital, it helps them gain confidence; improve academic and social skills; expand their job opportunities; learn to receive and give support; and become more involved in their communities.

Below, write a short story about a goal that you would like to achieve in your life and the people who can help you achieve that goal. The story can be fictional or based on true events. If your goal requires collaboration or a team effort, who would participate with you? Who would celebrate with you when you achieved your goal?

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“You are the sum total of the people you meet and interact with in the world. Whether it’s your family, peers, or co-workers, the opportunities you have and the things that you learn all come through doors that other people open for you.” — *Tanner Colby, author*