

Sparks Champions



Becoming a Spark Champion is one way mentors can maximize their impact and build a longer, stronger relationship with their mentees. What is a spark? A spark is something that gives a person's life meaning and purpose, and discovering and nurturing youths' sparks helps them succeed.

What is a Spark?

- A special quality, skill, or interest that lights us up and that we are passionate about.
- Something that comes from inside of us, and when we express it, it gives us joy and energy.
- It's our very essence, the things about us that is "good and beautiful, and useful to the world."



Children Discuss Sparks

Athletics



Animal Welfare

Spirituality or Religion

Reading

Nature, ecology, the environment

Creative Arts

Leading

Three Types of Sparks

Youth generally name three types of sparks:

- Something they are good at- a talent or skill
- Something they care deeply about-such as the environment or serving their community
- A quality they know is special-caring for others or being a friend

Results from Sparks Research

Young people who know their spark and have several adults who support their spark are less likely to:

- Experience Depression
- Engage in acts of violence toward others



Results (continued)...

When youth know their spark and have several adults who support their spark, they are more likely to:

- Have a sense of purpose
- Be socially competent and physically healthy
- Volunteer to help others
- Have higher grades in school and better attendance



The Critical Role of Mentors

- Only 37% can identify adults who know and support their spark. Mentors can play an important role in increasing this.
- All young people should have an adult who:
 1. Sees their Spark
 2. Affirms that Spark
 3. Helps them explore their Spark

The Critical Role of a Mentor (cont'd)

As spark champions, mentors can:

- Affirm the spark
- Encourage its expression
- Model the spark
- Provide opportunities to express it
- Run interference and help eliminate obstacles
- Teach or mentor
- Show up (at recitals, games, performances, play, reading, contests)

~~What is wrong?~~

Jake is habitually late for school, although he attends everyday. He is quite talkative and can be argumentative when he is challenged. Jake doesn't have a lot of friends. Part of the reason is his personal hygiene. Jake loves physical education, but seems to always argue with the umpire or referee when calls are not in his favor. Jake is struggling in all his classes except art where it appears he has a talent and passion for drawing. Jake is responsible for walking his little sister home every day after school. He doesn't like to do that but he does it. Jake wants to be a professional basketball player when he grows up.

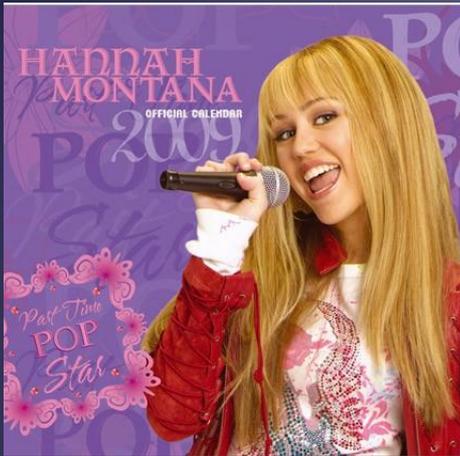
What is strong?

Talking with a child about Sparks

- Watch for signs of sparks
 - *“You really seem to enjoy...”*
- Share your own sparks
 - *“When I was your age, I was passionate about...”*
- Ask open-ended questions, and then listen
 - *“What do you think your spark is?”*
- Sparks handout/worksheet



Dreaming Big



My mentee's goal is to become a famous singer... however, she can't carry a tune at all!

- Even though it's tempting to dismiss kids' unrealistic dreams, be open to them. Keep communication open and ask questions to help them find their way.
- Find out whom your mentee admires. If you don't know much about the hero, ask questions to learn more.
- Encourage your mentee to learn new skills, master the skills he/she knows, and to continue to go deeper with his/her interests. Dreams require skill and dedication.
- Many kids become enthralled by their heroes who make a lot of money. They may watch YouTube videos of their fancy homes and cars. They may talk a lot about how they're going to live like that someday. When kids talk about this, ask other questions, such as "How does this person help other people?" and "How does this person make the world a better place?"



In Their Own Words

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bP89iBasyCE>

Discussion

- What did you learn about Sparks from the first few comments in the video?
- Can a Spark lead to a career? Does it have to?
- How does this video change how you view a young person close to you?
- In what ways can adults help kids explore, identify, and nurture their Sparks?

Resources

- <http://stepitup2thrive.org/downloads/1-sparks/1.5-sparks-ideas.pdf>
- [file:///kcws01/users/midthukd/Downloads/Insights-Evidence-student-spark-Nov-2010%20\(5\).pdf](file:///kcws01/users/midthukd/Downloads/Insights-Evidence-student-spark-Nov-2010%20(5).pdf)
- <http://stepitup2thrive.org/downloads/1-sparks/1.5-sparks-ideas.pdf>