

# Tips for Helping Youth Find a Spark

*Mentors may appreciate additional resources to help youth discover their spark. These ideas compliment the Sparks anchor paper that describes Search Institute's research, and the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive "Discover Your Sparks" youth survey.*

## Tips for Mentors

**Conversation:** Talking to others about activities that bring joy and energy can help a youth identify a spark. To start a conversation, a mentor might ask a youth these questions to promote self-reflection about possible sparks. Frame and reframe the questions in several different ways. Seek to listen more than talk. As you probe further, help the youth understand the "why" behind his or her responses.

- What makes you want to jump out of bed in the morning?
- What is your favorite day of the week? What do you look forward to doing that day?
- If you could spend a whole day doing anything you wanted, and money and resources were unlimited, what would you do? Why?
- What makes you feel really happy?<sup>1</sup>

**Observation:** A mentor can notice times when a youth is having a "flow" experience—a sustained "time doesn't exist" thrill. Pointing out these times may help the youth take a new look at his or her identity. After noticing when a youth is engaged in a particular activity, you can start a spark conversation by asking:

- What are the things you like about doing this?
- What can you do to learn more about this, or get better at it?
- Is there anything I can do to help?<sup>2</sup>

**Exploration:** A mentor can encourage a youth to try out at least one new activity. Help your youth develop a plan of action for identifying and exploring this new activity.



## Movies

Another way to help youth identify a personal spark is to observe others' sparks and spark champions. Encourage youth to conduct informational interviews with others to discuss their spark development and their perceptions of the youth's spark. Use movies to illustrate the concept of spark. Sample movies and suggested questions include:

### 1. Finding Forrester

What are Jamal's sparks? Why does Jamal only talk about one spark? Does Jamal's spark champion help him? How?

### 2. Billy Elliott

Can you describe Billy's look and feel when he's experiencing his spark? What does he do about dream thieves or obstacles? How do his spark champions help?

### 3. Akeelah and the Bee

What is Akeelah's spark? How does she grow it? How do her spark champions help?

## Sparks Brainstorm

Sometimes it is helpful to review a list of personal interests and passions that might be a spark.<sup>3</sup> Individuals can have multiple sparks simultaneously, and sparks can change over time.

Types of Sparks	Examples		
Animals	Caring for pets, protecting endangered species		
Arts	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Visual Arts Painting, drawing, pottery, photography</td> <td>Performing Arts Dance, acting</td> </tr> </table>	Visual Arts Painting, drawing, pottery, photography	Performing Arts Dance, acting
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Building	Construction, model cars, drawing, architecture		
Children	Babysitting, reading to kids, coaching		
Community service, volunteering, serving others	Cooking for your grandmother, cleaning your aunt's house, beautifying your community		
Computers	Programming, software, hardware, repair		
Entrepreneurship	Creating a business, developing a product, marketing to customers		
Languages	English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Tongan, Vietnamese, sign language		
Leadership	Student government, organizing a club, peer education		
Learning a subject	History, science, math, English		
Living in a specific way	With joy, passion or caring		
Mechanics and engineering	Electronics, mechanics- bike, car, motorcycle, plane, ship		
Music	Choir, band, orchestra, instrument, singing		
Nature or the environment	Taking walks in nature, birdwatching		
Reading	Novels, graphic novels/comic books, poetry, magazines		
Relationships	Making friends, helping or supporting friends and family, conflict resolution		
Solving social problems	Racism, poverty, at-risk kids, pollution		
Spirituality or religion	Meditation, reading spiritual writing, singing in church/temple/mosque		
Sports	Soccer, baseball, running, dancing, football, swimming, lifting weights		
Writing	Poetry, fiction, journaling, essays, short stories		

## Footnotes

1. Benson, Peter L., (2008) Sparks. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. p. 57-58.
2. Benson, Peter L., (2008) Sparks. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. p. 64-66.
3. Hong, Kay. (2008) Sparks: Try a New Conversation. Search Institute.
4. Hong, Kay. (2008) Sparks: Try a New Conversation. Search Institute.