

# Tips for Conversations about Thriving

Researchers offer some important clues for giving good feedback. Help young people deepen awareness about strengths they have developed and areas for growth. Promote their beliefs that they can develop skills and attributes for life success.

## Preparation

The Step-It-Up-2-Thrive process helps young people reflect about their sparks, adopt a growth mindset, and reflect upon the skills and attributes that are universally necessary to reach one's full potential. In this stage of the process, youth identify their strengths to apply in pursuit of goals. They identify skills and attributes they'd like to improve and risk factors in the way. Researchers recommend that caring adults engage in conversations with youth to unfold a full view of the road to thriving. Adults are encouraged to read the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive anchor papers on the indicators of thriving, so they can explain definitions accurately, in their own words.

## Tips for Your Conversations

### 1. Introduce the Indicators of Thriving (Thriving Wheel)

- *I believe in you and I have high expectations.* Thriving conversations spring from a caring, trusting relationship. Explicitly state your belief in this young person's high potential.
- *Explain:* "Researchers have defined this collection of skills and attributes as universally necessary for us to become all we can be. We call this collection the twelve Indicators of Thriving. Around the edge of the Thriving Wheel, you can see how they fall into headings that researchers call the "6 Cs". For all of us, it's a lifelong journey to work on this collection. It takes a lot of effort."
- *Ask questions such as:*
  - "If I ask you to pick two indicators that you've worked on the most, which two would you pick?"
  - "Can you share more about these strengths?" "Do they tie to a spark?" "Do you use them in other ways?"
  - "Which two indicators would you like to be better at?" "Why?"
  - "Where on this wheel would growth help you attain something that matters?" "Why?"
- *Use "I Statements" to add relevant observations:* Start each key point with an "I" message, such as: "I have noticed," "I have observed," "I have seen".
- *Share:* Avoid too much self-disclosure, but a well-timed strategic story from your own life can help the youth construct meaning. (Be careful not to shift the focus from the youth's story to your own story.)
- *State observations rather than interpretations:* Identify specific behaviors you've observed rather than impressions. Associate observations with a clear and brief timeline, such as, "I have seen you make terrific effort here..." "I have seen you make choices which include going out late with your friends on school nights, three times in the last two weeks". Stay away from "You never" or "You always" statements, such as "I hear you always stay up late". They tend to trigger defensiveness.

## 2. Introduce the subject of Risk Factors (Risk Factors Wheel)

- 🎧 *Explain:* "This is a wheel of risk factors that commonly get in the way of being all you can be. You may not have these risk factors or you may have some that are not named here. While the thriving indicators are universal, these are not."
- 🎧 *Ask:* "Can you place yourself on this wheel? Or, would you draw yourself a different wheel?" "Can any of these risk factors get in the way of you being all you can be?"

## 3. Support the youth to share sensitive information

- 🎧 *Use Empathetic Response Leads:* Sometimes youth share stories that include trauma, fears or dreams. When this happens, use an empathetic response lead to show you value his/her experience and understand how it feels. The basic "formula" for an Empathetic Response Lead is: You feel <this way> because of <experience or behavior>. This can be said in a variety of ways.

Examples include:

- "Could it be you're feeling alone at the new school because kids haven't been approaching you and it's hard for you to talk to them?"
- "What I'm hearing is that you're afraid this may have a long-term impact, and you don't know what to do about it."
- "It sounds to me like you feel uncertain about how to respond and are afraid you may say or do the wrong thing."

Be careful to not "project" or "lead" the youth as you respond empathetically. You can misinterpret feelings and when the youth corrects your misperception, you have a chance to paraphrase the youth's thoughts and feelings and learn even more.

- 🎧 *Regulate your own emotions through the process:* Be aware of changes in your tone, body language and facial expressions. Youth may say things in the Conversation that surprise or concern you. If you appear shocked or disappointed, it may discourage the young person from continuing to share thoughts with you. Individuals also tend to change topics when they aren't comfortable. Be especially aware of monitoring yourself and resisting the tendency to change the subject. And, sense when it's better to not push the conversation and instead, wait for another day.
  - Your tone of voice carries considerable information about your feelings. Pay attention to how your voice sounds and take steps to soften your tone, slow the pace of your speech, and pause briefly before responding. Show you care about the youth, rather than positioning yourself as making a judgement.
  - If you find yourself lost or puzzled about what to say next .... relax. Consider responding with a question or brief comment.
  - Be aware of whether making direct eye contact encourages more or less talking. This varies from person to person.
- 🎧 *Allow for silence:* Being comfortable with silence can be one of the most powerful ways of supporting your youth. It shows that you can sit with the gravity of what has been told you, and you will not attempt to "gloss over" his/her experience. Sometimes the most important gift you can give a youth is just listening.