

Cultivating Sparks in Children

We are all interested in many things. However, there are only a few things that makes each of us tick. These are referred to as our “spark”. A spark is something that gives meaning to our life; it is a passion. When a child has a spark, it gives them motivation to succeed in that area, but it can transfer into other areas of life as well, such as academics. In addition, when a child engages in their spark activity, it strengthens their character skills, helping them develop into prosocial members of society. When kids find their sparks, they are more likely to avoid risks.

The hardest part is often just identifying what their sparks are. The adults and mentors in kids lives should seek to determine what kids are passionate about and help them nurture that passion.

BUT HOW DO WE FIND THE SPARK IN A CHILD IF HE OR SHE DOES NOT KNOW WHAT IT IS?

Talk with them. Keep a journal of things that they say they like or dislike. You can revisit the journal at any time and see what kinds of activities they are interested in, or what they talk about a lot. You can plan activities around these topics of conversation.

Ask questions. Find out what is happening when they are happy or excited and who they are with when they feel that way. When you and your student are doing an activity together, ask them questions like, “Are you enjoying this activity? What do you like most about it?” By listening to their answers, you can plan future activities based on what they say they like or dislike about an activity.

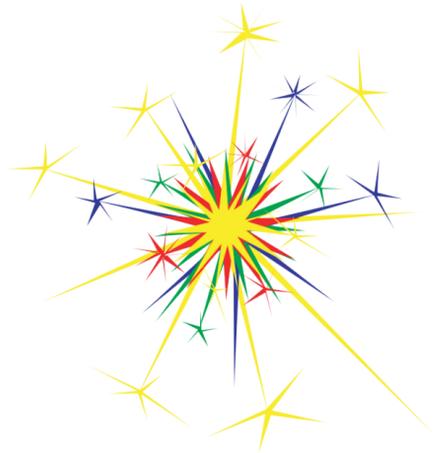
Observing the activities they chose. Does your student always go for building materials? Or art supplies? Watch your student as they participate in an activity and see what makes their face light up, or what they seem to be engrossed in.

Provide tools, resources, time, and energy. Try to plan different activities with your student in order to expose them to many different areas of possible interest. If you see that from these activities your student is excited to do it again or learn more about, this may be a spark. Research that subject to find other opportunities to tell your student about.

When children show a spark for something, in order to nurture it, we should acknowledge it and push them to reach for goals in that area. Seek out books and other activities that to their spark activity.

Encourage them to try new things. If you never try, you never know if you might really like it. The time they spend with you engaging in their spark activity is a safe place for them to be themselves despite how it may be perceived by others.

We aren't trying to find their future career, but their sparks could definitely lead to a future job. Teaching students to discover their sparks helps them feel confident and brave enough to try other sparks as they come along.



Here are some Questions to help identify sparks:

- What motivates you?
- When do you feel energized? Why do you feel energized?
- Who makes you feel energized?
- If you could spend the whole day doing something what would that be?
- What have you done that you are proud of?
- What do you never get bored of?
- What makes you happy?
- When and where are you when you feel the happiest?
- What have you done (or what things have you learned about) that you would like to know more about?
- What person in your life do you admire and why?
- What famous person would you like to be? Why?



Here are some questions you can ask to help nurture and support their spark:

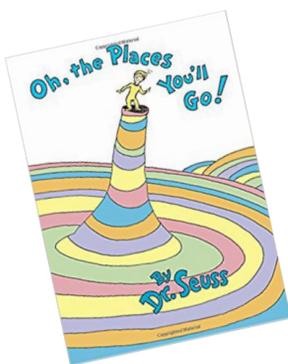
- What obstacles do you face in nurturing your spark?
 - What would help you?
- What can you do to help nurture your spark?
 - How can I help you?



BOOKS

“Oh, the Places You’ll Go!” by Dr. Seuss

This book is the story of a boy and all of the adventures life brings. This is a good book for this topic because it helps both mentors and students learn that there a lot of different paths in life and discovery is the best way to learn.



ACTIVITIES

FAN THE FLAME

Materials: Poster board, Construction paper, tape, markers

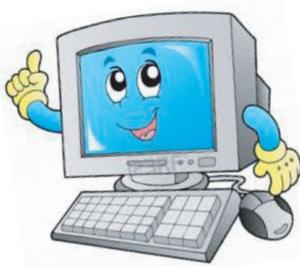
Procedure: Brainstorm with your student some sparks that they have. Then, cut out some things that are used to build a fire (log, matches, flames). Write the sparks on the poster board and use the construction paper to build the fire proportionally to the size of the students passion for it (if they have a small passion for volleyball, build a small fire, but if they have a huge passion for animals, build a bigger fire). This will be a visual representation to the student on what their spark is. You can revisit this as a spark dampens or grows. Taped construction paper would be best because you can add to the fire or take away from the fire. The student can see sparks that they want to put more attention in to. You can also do each spark on separate pieces of paper if a large poster board would be difficult to transport to meeting places or there is nowhere to display it.



RESEARCHING ACTIVITIES

Materials: Internet Access

Procedure: This activity needs creativity on the mentor and student's part. Go online and look up videos of activities that your student may want to try. Think of some activities that you think they may like, or just to expose them to something new. Sometimes it is hard for a student to think about doing an activity if they don't know a lot about it. Showing them will be a great way for them to try to visualize themselves doing it. Record the things you find that they want to try and try to do the activities with them. If you can't, you could do some research for opportunities that would expose them to it. For example, camps, clubs, elective classes at their school, or after school programs.



NURTURING A SPARK

Materials: Paper, Markers

Procedure: If your student is already in engaged in a spark activity, this will help them grow and develop more in their spark activity. Have your student draw a picture or write about what they like about their spark and what they do when they engage in the spark activity. Then, have them draw or describe where they would like to be in their activity. For example, a student's spark is working with horses – right now they are learning to ride a horse but want to compete in equestrian games someday. You can help them set realistic goals by asking them what they are going to do to get to where they want to be.

