**Introduction**

This spark introduces your team to elements of an adolescent-centered environment and outlines key staff behaviors that are essential to providing youth-friendly treatment. It is meant to begin the process of becoming a more welcoming environment to young people, to suggest possible avenues for improvement, and to trigger discussions about a range of issues related to making your organization a safe space for young people.

**Objectives**

By the end of this Spark training, participants will be able to:

1. Identify youth-friendly behaviors
2. Identify characteristics of youth-friendly organizations

**Supplies**

Prepare these supplies prior to facilitating this Spark.

- Laptop
- Projector
- Speakers
- Video: give yourself time before the Spark to test the video and sound.
- Copies of the *Being Youth-Friendly Spark Handout* for all participants
- Writing utensils for all participants

**Additional Resources**

If you would like to learn more about this Spark topic, take a look at these additional resources.

- [Assessment of Youth-Friendly Health Care: A Systematic Review of Indicators Drawn From Young People’s Perspectives](#)
- [Characteristics of Youth-Friendly Clinical Services](#)

**Citation**

If you plan to modify this resource, please cite or credit as: Being Youth Friendly. Spark Training developed by the Adolescent Health Initiative at Michigan Medicine; August 2017; Ann Arbor, MI.
Being Youth-Friendly

Key Concepts (5 MINUTES)

3 – TEENS SPEAK

Now let’s hear from teens directly. This three-minute video focuses on how a health care setting can be more welcoming to young people, and many of the points could apply to other types of youth-serving organizations. As you watch, keep these questions in mind: What might when youth don’t feel comfortable accessing services? What might happen when they do feel comfortable?

Click link on the slide to play video, or use: https://youtu.be/vAu5ad82718.

4 – TEENS SPEAK

Discussion: Thinking about the video and the perspectives of youth, what might happen when they don’t feel comfortable with their health care experience? And what might happen when they do feel comfortable?
Consider sharing a brief story from your own experience working with teens.

5 – THE DEVELOPING TEEN BRAIN

While teens are in this transitional stage of life, we know from research that teen brains are at a critical point of development. The part of the brain that controls executive functioning – which includes judgment and cause and effect – is not fully developed until the mid-20s. When teens make decisions that seem questionable, it’s helpful to remember that this can be developmentally appropriate, even if it’s frustrating for us to see.

6 – RISK-TAKING

Risk-taking is a perfect example of something that is developmentally appropriate – related to adolescent brain development. People of all ages take risks, but it’s at its peak during adolescence, and can be both good and bad. There are emotional risks, social risks, and physical risks that all help adolescents to build their identity.

7 – RISK BEHAVIORS

But, some risks can be unsafe. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that 3 out of 4 adolescent deaths, diseases, and disabilities are a direct result of risky behaviors. This is disproportionately high compared to other age groups. This also means that there are opportunities for prevention, and that we, as adults who care about youth, can impact a young person’s outcomes through our services. Providing a space where young people feel respected and valued can create opportunities to reduce risky behaviors.

So, if their behaviors are developmentally appropriate, as challenging as they may be, what can we as adults do to help them along the way? Also, what can we as youth-serving professionals do to be truly youth-friendly?

Application (5 MINUTES)

8 – YOUTH-FRIENDLY BEHAVIORS

One of our main goals with becoming more youth-friendly is to look at how we interact with young people and help them feel welcome here. There are a lot of ways that youth-serving organizations can be welcoming to young people, and we have 8 of these behaviors listed on the bottom of your Teen Years activity sheet. For the next few minutes, we will review a couple of scenarios, and discuss which youth-friendly behavior that scenario relates to. There is no right answer, and for some there could be multiple answers.

9 – YOUTH-FRIENDLY BEHAVIORS

“My mom talks to her, she talks to my mom. It’s like I’m not even there.” In this quote, Luis is clearly referring to an appointment where his mother is present, as an example of a not-so-youth-friendly interaction. Which of the behaviors on your sheet does this relate to?

Answer: #3. Listens to and objectively considers what young people have to say.
10 – YOUTH-FRIENDLY BEHAVIORS

The following story is from Ray at age 21, who was trying to get connected to a service that usually requires insurance. “When I explained to the staff that I didn’t have insurance, she was like, ‘Oh, there’s this program, and there’s this resource, you can get help here, or you can go this route,’ and it was just like wow, no one ever told me that. Otherwise, I felt doomed, and she kind of gave me hope. I’ve gone to other really nice places, and same thing, they were just positive about it, like ‘That’s no big deal, we can work with that, and there’s options.’ Whenever I was given options and I didn’t feel hopeless, it was a good experience.” Which youth-friendly behavior is this an example of?

Answer: #6. Patiently helps youth navigate referrals and any other systems that may be challenging.

11 – YOUTH-FRIENDLY BEHAVIORS

Monica, a youth worker, provides support to middle and high school students. She says, “I really try to give the same quality of service for all of the youth I provide service to. But if I’m totally honest with myself, I think that I go the extra mile for kids who are better students. I was brought up to really value hard work and good grades, and I have to remind myself that kids often have legitimate reasons why they don’t get strong grades.”

Answer: #2. Provides and/or supports fair treatment and equal opportunity for ALL youth.

12 – YOUTH-FRIENDLY BEHAVIORS

“You have to explain that nothing bad is going to happen if I’m honest.” What do you think Jordan is referring to when they say “nothing bad is going to happen?” Which youth-friendly behavior does this relate to?

Answer: #1. Discusses with youth what information they share will be kept private.

13 – THANK YOU!

To keep this conversation going over the next month, I will share Sparklers, or case scenarios, that relate to being youth-friendly. I’ll post the Sparklers around the office in places that you all can easily see them. When you see a Sparkler, take a moment to read the scenario and think through the questions listed on the page. Thank you for your participation!

Print and post Sparklers in areas your staff can see (e.g., lunchroom).