

## Introduction

Encourage your team to consider how staff in varied roles can create a climate where young people are more likely to discuss their sexual health openly and honestly.

## Objectives

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

- Identify some of the ways your organization already supports strengths-based approaches to adolescent sexual health.
- Describe basic terms and concepts related to strengths-based approaches to adolescent sexual health.

## Supplies

Prepare these supplies prior to facilitating this Spark.

- Laptop
- Projector

## Additional Resources

If you would like to learn more about this Spark topic, or want to find health care services to refer teens to, take a look at these additional resources.

- IPPF's [Keys to youth-friendly services](#)
- [Society for Adolescent Health & Medicine: Sexual & Reproductive Health Resources for Adolescents and Young Adults](#)

## Citation

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

## Key of Icons

 = Slide change     = Estimated duration of topic     = Script for facilitator     = Note for facilitator

Intro/Hook  (5 minutes) 1 – TITLE SLIDE

 Today we are going to do a 15-minute “Spark” mini-training. We’ll be discussing how we approach sexual health with young people, and how our attitudes can set a tone with them.

 Introduce yourself/yourselfes, and explain how this fits into your organization’s practices/practice improvement plans, if applicable.

 2 – TRICKY TOPICS

 There are many youth serving organizations -- from health centers to schools -- that provide sexual health education and services (like HIV testing) to young people. In our roles we may need to discuss sexual health with young people, and it can be uncomfortable for them to talk about sex. It can be hard for us, too. Some of us might be parenting a teen, which can affect how we view the teens we work with. Our values and our life experiences can also influence us. It’s not always easy for people of any age to talk about sexual health!

 3 – TALKING TO TEENS ABOUT SEX

 If you ask people to describe conversations between adults and teens about sex, here are some key words that come up.

 Allow people a moment to read through the list.

 In our organization, we have a chance to create a space where teens will come to us for support regarding their sexual health and be honest with us when they do. We can change the dynamic from negative to affirming.

 4 – TALKING TO TEENS ABOUT SEX

 The conversations we have with young people about their sexual health are **necessary**. They provide an **opportunity** for us to give **important, accurate** information in a **respectful** way, to make a **healthy, lifelong impact** on our young people. Consider this question as we go through this Spark: How can we actively commit to shifting away from the negative parts of this list, and what can we do to set a tone that is respectful and healthy?

 5 – SETTING A TONE

 Now let's consider this quote from Maya Angelou, and think about how it applies to our approaches with young people and sexual health.

 Pause to give people a chance to read it.

 We hope teens don't forget what we say when we tell them about how to prevent pregnancy, STIs, and how to have healthy relationships. But if they don't **feel** respected, what can the result be?

 Invite a few people to share their thoughts.

 To consider ways we can convey a respectful tone, let's look at two ways an adult can talk to young people about sexual health.

 6 – SHADES OF MEANING

 Read these two approaches to yourself.

 Pause to give people a chance to read it.

 It's easy to understand why the adult in the first situation said what they did. Their intent probably comes from a place of concern. However, most people, including teens, already know that risky behaviors are not healthy. The second approach focuses on what the teen is doing well, which is a strengths-based approach, instead of focusing on the negative or sounding critical. Why might the second approach be more effective in helping the teen consider healthier behaviors?

 Invite a few people to share their thoughts.

**Content**  (6 minutes) 7 – BEING STRENGTHS-BASED

 Experts recommend that adults adopt a “strengths-based approach” when talking to teens about sex, which frames sexuality as a normal part of life, and acknowledges that sexual feelings are natural. It involves listening to teens and considering their viewpoints with respect, even if their values appear to be different from yours. Providing accurate information about sexual health gives teens the tools to make healthy decisions. And finally, we can reinforce their healthy decisions with affirming statements.

Some adults worry that by being respectful when teens are engaging in risky sexual behaviors, it will be perceived as encouraging them to take risks. However, we are more likely to have a positive impact on their behaviors when we treat teens respectfully – just like people of all ages want to be treated.

 8 – COUNTERACTING NEGATIVE MESSAGING

 Being strengths-based means that we are counteracting some of the many negative, confusing, or contradictory messages that young people receive about sexuality. In the past, most approaches to adolescent sexual health were based on avoiding disease, and focused on what NOT to do, rather than how to make healthy decisions.

Teens tell us – and research supports this – that scare tactics, lecturing, and shaming do not help young people avoid risky behaviors. We can still try to help teens reduce risky behaviors, and reinforce the healthy behavior choices they’re making with positive, affirming comments. Let’s look at some more examples to see how this looks in practice.

 9 – MESSAGING

 Imagine a student is talking to their health teacher about missing an upcoming class on sexual health. The teacher says, “It’s just about sexually transmitted infections. Don’t worry, as long as you’re not promiscuous, you won’t be missing anything.” Take a moment to think about this statement.

 [Pause for a moment.](#)

 10 – MESSAGING

 What do you think the teacher’s intent might have been?

 [Invite a few people to share their thoughts.](#)

 What might the impact be on the teen? How could this be re-phrased to be more strengths-based?

 [Invite a few people to share their thoughts.](#)

 11 – MESSAGING

 Here’s a comment made by a staff member on the phone with a teen, scheduling an appointment. “Sure, Joe, I can schedule you for an HIV test. Wait – weren’t you just here for one a few weeks ago?” Take a moment to think about this statement.

 12 – MESSAGING

 What do you think the staff member’s intent might have been in asking this question?

 [Invite a few people to share their thoughts.](#)

 What might the impact be on Joe? How might he feel if he hears this? How could this be re-phrased to better consider the impact on Joe?

 [Invite a few people to share their thoughts.](#)

 13 – MESSAGING

 Let's look at one last situation. CJ is thinking about no longer using birth control and tells this to her counselor. The counselor says, "CJ, you're only 17. I can see how hard it is for you to take care of the baby you already have. It sounds like you don't mind the side effects of your birth control. Why would you want to stop using it?"

 Pause for a moment.

 14 – MESSAGING

 What do you think the counselor's intent was?

 Invite a few people to share their thoughts.

 How might CJ feel in this situation? What could be changed to make it more strengths-based?

 Invite a few people to share their thoughts.

## Application (4 minutes)

 15 – APPLYING TO OUR WORK WITH YOUTH

 We've talked about how a strengths-based approach is based on the assumption that young people deserve accurate information and respectful treatment related to sexual health. What challenges do we have with practicing this? What can each of us do, in our different roles, to be strengths-based?

 Invite a few people to share their thoughts.

 16 – THANK YOU!

 To keep this conversation going over the next month, I will share Sparklers, or case scenarios, that relate to this topic. 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!