

Sparks



Book Discussion Guide

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We hope you find these discussion questions helpful as you and your group—of neighbors, parents, teachers, youth workers—read the book and start to see how it can change the way you parent, the way you work, the way you teach, the way you live.

Introduction

- When you read the sentences about sparks at the beginning of the introduction, is it inspiring to you?
- The author notes some contemporary challenges for young people—over-use of technology, the gap between rich and poor, the want-it-now attitude. Did these strike a chord with you? Are there other aspects of modern life or modern teens that make pursuing a spark difficult?
- Did you see yourself or your friends and neighbors in the section about parents today? Are there stressors or temptations facing you that aren't noted in the book?
- Were you surprised at the many benefits connected with teens who have sparks plus caring adults who know and support their sparks?

Part One: Five Steps to Help Ignite Your Teen's Sparks

Step One

- Take a look at the spark characteristics in the section about unlocking our purpose. Do you have a spark that has all those characteristics? Share with the group about that spark.
- Take turns reading aloud some of the statements by teens from across the United States about spark. Does reading them aloud help bring the presence of those teens into the room and into the discussion?
- How can you see sparks helping the teens you know to find a pathway through life?
- Were you surprised at the details of the findings from the sparks research? In what way?

Step Two

- How well do you feel you know your own teenager these days?
- How close are you to extended family and other adults who know your teen well?
- What strengths or passions do you see in your teen or the other teens you know?
- What can you see as your child's main personality trait? Has his temperament changed over the years since childhood?
- What did you find helpful in the discussion about teenagers in general and their development?
- If you haven't already, do the quiz on teen development and see how you do!
- What are the three pathways through adolescence? Which of those pathways was most like your teen years?
- Did you already know how important adult relationships are to young people, or was that news to you?

Step Three

- Do you have any interesting insights as you have considered your own sparks through the course of your life?
- How would you explain spark to a young person? Have you tried this?
- Did you and your teen do the survey called the self-assessment spark scale? What kind of conversation occurred between the two of you after that?
- Were you surprised at the list of the 10 major categories of sparks?

- Do you know any young people who are still in the discovery process of finding their spark(s)? How might you help them?
- Which was your favorite anecdote about unusual places where sparks can be ignited?

Step Four

- The author says, “Our job as a parent is to help our child discover her spark, awaken it, nurture it, celebrate it, make room for it.” How does that idea change or affirm the way you see yourself as a parent?
- How are you already being the captain of your child’s spark team? What else might you do?
- Who can you invite to become a part of that team who isn’t already on it?
- Have you shared the ideas in this book with other parents you know? If not, commit now to talking with just one other parent about it, and see if there are ways you can support each other’s children!

Step Five

- Take a few moments as a group or in pairs to talk about the sparks support group questions:
- What are your child’s sparks? When did you first see these sparks? Who are your child’s spark champions?
- Have you begun having spark conversations with your teen or with other teens you know? (If not, see the free downloadable resource of Spark Conversation Starters on www.ignitesparks.com.)
- What did you discover when you worked through the keeping the spark lit questionnaire?
- Are you pursuing your own sparks? Are any of the obstacles noted for teenagers blocks that you’ve come up against too?
- Does viewing one’s life as a spark journey help you worry less about your teen?

Part Two: What Helps Teens Thrive

On The Road To A Hopeful Future: Stories From Across America

- Which of the “thriving youth” stories had the most impact on you or taught you an important lesson?
- Did any of them remind you of your own teenager?
- Did any of them give you a new idea for how to encourage and support sparks in your teenager or other teens you know?
- Have you tried out the suggestion of having your teen read some of these stories? What did he or she think of them?

Thriving Youth, Thriving Nation

- The connection of sparks and generosity is an interesting, provocative concept—does that ring true for you? How might that connect with the earlier idea of spark and “spirit”?
- Are the spark lessons a useful listing of key points?
- The Top 10 Spark list presents guidelines parents could use as they are raising their teenagers—do you find it practical? How do you imagine using these guidelines as you are negotiating with your teen about how he or she uses his time? About how you spend time together?
- Did you try out the checklist of dynamics of thriving youth? What did you discover? Has the outcome helped you to see some new ways to assist your teen in finding, igniting, and nourishing her or his spark?

Resources

- Is your teen one of the many young people who is not yet clear about what her sparks are? How can you use the sparks tapestry to help her explore possibilities?
- What other practical things could you try? (E.g., offer her the chance to take any low-cost community education class she might find in a catalog.)
- Did you find out anything about yourself in looking through the tapestry of sparks?