Help Ignite the Hidden Strength of your Teen

If you were to name the one or two things that really get your teen excited, that get them ready to jump out of bed in the morning, what would they be? For one individual, it might be writing a fantastical story. For another, it might be soccer or music. Every teen has at least one unique, worthy, and passionate interest or talent. The Search Institute calls this passionate interest or talent an individual’s “spark.” Everyone has a spark, but helping teens find and develop their talents and interests is about helping them become the best that they can be. Helping to ignite these sparks within will allow them to reach their full potential both academically and emotionally which will, in turn, help them to contribute to making the world a better place for everyone. Here are some tips:

**For teens 14-15**
- Don’t be surprised if your child begins to drop activities they’ve been involved with for years. This is common for some teenagers because of the rapid changes that are happening with their bodies and brains at this age.
- If your child does want to drop something, only allow it if a replacement is found. This is an important boundary that also empowers teens to chose something new. Be reassuring, but be firm about having them find a replacement.
- Emphasize the importance of practicing and sticking to things, even when they get difficult or boring. (For example: practicing an instrument before computer/friend time).
- Support your teen’s sparks by attending concerts, games, and other events. Tell your teen you’re proud of him/her and the progress they’re making.

**For teens 16-18**
- Make it a habit to check in with your teen on a regular basis (once a week or once a month, depending on what the spark is).
- Ask your teen where he is with his talents and interests. Are they still excited? Have they hit any obstacles? What difficulties have they worked through? Who supports them best?
- Thank the adults that support and nurture your teen’s spark.
- Set a good example. Teens not only learn a driven life by experience, but also by observing the adults around them. Talk about how your journey had obstacles, as well.
- Celebrate milestones, for example, your teen may be recognized in the community newspaper, or they put 100 volunteer hours at the animal shelter.

If your teen hasn’t found their “spark” yet, have them visit the counseling department. We can discuss various clubs, sports and activities they may like to get involved in. To check out more on this topic, research the Search Institute at [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)