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MAKE SPARKS FLY

Participate in High-Quality Youth Programs

Be productive with your spare time: A Search Institute study found that teens who experience supportive relationships and a supportive community, as well as opportunities for involvement and opportunities that nurture sparks, are significantly more successful than their peers who lack one or more of these strengths.¹ While participating in school activities is a great start, sometimes participating in activities outside of school can have even greater benefits and rewards. So, what are you doing with your spare time?

There are many opportunities outside of school that can have a positive impact in the lives of students. For example, some students participate in the 4-H club, YMCA, YWCA, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs, Campfire USA or other local community groups like sports teams or dance companies. These high-quality youth organizations give students an opportunity to discover, explore and nurture their sparks. Interview a peer about her or his activities outside of school. Follow the directions below.

INTERESTING INTERVIEWS

DIRECTIONS:

1. Find a partner to interview.
2. Take 4 minutes to interview your partner. Take turns asking and answering questions. Use the questions below as a guide. Feel free to add more questions related to participation in youth organizations.
3. Briefly record your partner's responses.
4. Answer the final question yourself.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. Do you participate in one or more youth organizations? If "yes," in what organization(s) do you participate? If "no," what organization might you want to explore?
2. What is the biggest impact this organization has had/could have on your life?
3. How do/could the members of this organization offer support and encouragement to you? Explain.
4. Why should other students join this organization?

FINAL QUESTION:

After interviewing your fellow student, what did you learn about being a part of a high-quality youth organization?

Create your own high-quality youth organization: Imagine that you are creating your very own "spark club" centered around your special interest or talent. What would you call it? What goals would you set? What would you hope to accomplish? Consider the following "must-haves" when creating your organization:

- Is it a safe program setting?
- Will participants learn skills such as teamwork and conflict resolution?
- Will participants have an opportunity to develop warm and trusting relationships with peers and adults?
- Will participants be included in decision-making?
- Will participants be encouraged to share their talents and interests?
- Add any other items you want to include.

Once you have determined the name and goals of your organization, create a short press release for USA TODAY. Explain the who, what, where, when, why and how of your organization. Read a Money section article about a business to explore the information that press releases include.

Explore what other youth are doing with their spare time: Go to at15.com and become a member. View the Jordyn Shellhart video on the home page. How is she pursuing her spark after school? What can you take from Jordyn's video to apply to your own life?

¹ "Teen Voice 2009: The Untapped Strengths of 15-Year-Olds. The Search Institute, Minneapolis: 2009.

