

The Power of Relationships

Many factors influence a person's chance of developing a substance use disorder. It can be helpful to focus on strengthening protective factors – factors that reduce the risk of substance abuse. A primary example of a protective factor is a strong relationship between a young person and a caring adult (parent, guardian, etc.).

The following questions can strengthen the relationship between adult and young person by understanding and validating four important aspects of the young person's lives, each of which starts with the letter S.

SPARKS questions – talents, deep interests, and activities you love doing

1. What is something you really enjoy doing – that gives you pleasure and that you almost lose track of time when you do it?
2. Is there a subject that you are interested in learning more about?
3. What subject in school are you most interested in? It doesn't matter if you are good at it or not.

STRENGTH questions – skills, values, habits, and other things about you that help you do well in life

4. What are some of the best things about you?
5. What are you good at doing?
6. Are there any values or rules that you try to live by? What do you think is important in life?

STRUGGLES things you worry about and that cause you problems

7. Are there things that you worry about or are afraid of?
8. Are there places you don't like to go or people you don't like to be around?
9. Is there anything you wish you could change about yourself?

SUPPORTS people and program and even places that help you get through your struggles and succeed at things

10. Who are the people that matter most to you?
11. Who can you talk to when you have a problem?
12. Are there programs you participate in or places you go that help you do things you want to do or need to do?

This exercise is adapted from the SEARCH Institute. Visit search-institute.org for more information!