Igniting Sparks and Helping Youth Thrive

Comprehensive Community Services and Coordinated Services Teams Initiative
Joint Statewide Meeting

White Pine Consulting, Inc.

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Learning and Performance Objectives

1. **Understand Sparks and be able to identify one's own Sparks.**
2. **Understand Sparks and be able to help youth identify theirs.**
3. **Understand how Sparks support thriving by supporting a sense of or quest for purpose which activates brain executive function.**
4. **Understand youth development and how to support and create the kinds of experiences needed for optimal well-being.**
5. **Understand thriving and how to develop care plan goals that are more likely to support it by tapping into the youth's Sparks.**

What We'll Cover

- **Module 1: Definition of Sparks: Using the Strengths Information from Your Assessments**
- **Module 2: Understanding the Nature of *Human Nature* (Much More Than Selfish Drives, Troublesome Impulses, and Unbridled Instincts)**
- **Module 3: The Brain and Positive Youth Development (Understanding What Our Care Plans Support)**
- **Module 4: Collaborative Planning and Care Provision to Help Youth Thrive: The Importance of Growth Goals**

Module 1: Definition of Sparks: Using the Strengths Information from Your Assessments

A Natural Aspect of Youth Development is Beginning to Experience One's Authentic Self

A noble idealism automatically unfolds in young people, impelling them to search for some model or expression of it. . . The great and lasting cultures of history held before their young people symbolic figures who rose above their lower natures . . . Were the young person given the appropriate stimuli, a brain growth spurt would take place around age fifteen, ushering in the new block of intelligences obviously waiting.

Joseph Chilton Pearce *Evolution's End: Claiming the Potential of Our Intelligence*, 1992

The new block or type of intelligence that is waiting is spiritual intelligence, self-knowledge, self-actualization.

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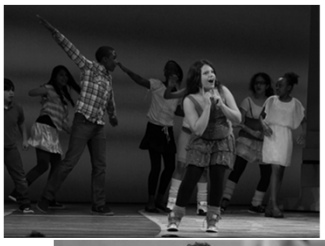
What Are Sparks?

- **Passionate interests; special abilities, talents, gifts – those things that give us meaning, focus, energy, and joy.**
- **A special quality, skill, or interest that lights us up and that we are passionate about.**
- **Our very essence, that thing about us that is "good and beautiful, and useful to the world."**

The power of sparks comes when:

- **You know your spark(s).**
- **Your spark(s) is/are important to you.**
- **You take initiative to develop your spark(s).**



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Making Meaning and Developing Purpose: Primary Tasks of Youth Development

"A spark is something that gives your life meaning and purpose. It is an interest, a passion, or a gift."

Dr. Peter Benson

Meaning in life is often defined as a sense of one's life having a purpose or investing time and energy into the attainment of cherished goals (Ryff & Singer, 1988).

The Powerful Developmental Shift During Adolescence: Waiting For and Seeking Meaningful Experiences

First, starting around age eleven, an idealistic image of life grows in intensity throughout the middle teens.

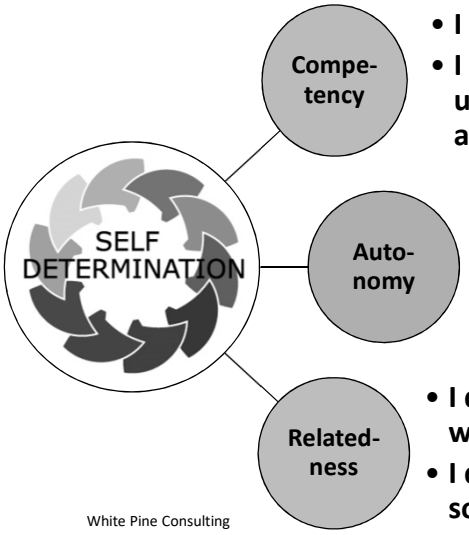
Second, somewhere around age fourteen or fifteen a great expectation arises that "something tremendous is supposed to happen."

Third, adolescents sense a secret, unique greatness in themselves that seeks expression.

Joseph Chilton Pearce
Evolution's End: Claiming the Potential of Our Intelligence
1992, p. 190

The youth is now operating with spiritual intelligence: tapping into an "inner knowing," an image of the possible self not connected to concrete, actual events. Often put down by others as unrealistic or impractical.

What Makes Experiences Meaningful?
(Supports Thriving as Activity is About More Than Just Keeping Busy)



- I can do it
- I do it well; uses my abilities

- I choose or want to do it
- I help plan what happens

- I did/shared it with someone
- I did it for someone

(Source: Sheldon and Elliot, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1999, Vol. 67, No. 3)

A Useful Definition of Purpose

Purpose

A stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self.

(William Damon, et al., "The Development of Purpose During Adolescence," Applied Developmental Science, 2003, Volume 7, Number 3, 119-128)

If you can't figure out your purpose, figure out your passion. For your passion will lead you right into your purpose.

T.D. Jakes

Developing Purpose Is Not Optional

(We Should Make Helping Youth Develop Purpose a Part of Our Casework Practice)

A growing body of theoretical and empirical research suggests that a noble purpose in life is associated with optimal human development. Psychological researchers have identified a noble purpose as a developmental asset (Benson, 2006), an important component of human flourishing (Seligman, 2002), and a key factor in thriving (Bundick, Yeager, King & Damon, 2009).

("A Grounded Theory of the Development of Noble Purpose," Kendall Cotton Bronk *Journal of Adolescent Research,* 2011)

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Developing and Following Purpose Naturally Engages Executive Function (Executive Processes and Their Subordinate Executive Skills)

Development of Purpose
(Optimal Functioning - Realization of Potential)

Executive Attention	Planning and Task Setting	Inhibitory Control	Performance Monitoring
Self-awareness Working memory Attentional control: ▪ divided attention ▪ sustained attention ▪ selective attention ▪ alternating attention	Self-activation Sequencing activities Task initiation Planning and prioritizing Meta-cognition Problem-solving Decision making	Self-control Shifting focus (between tasks, mental states, rule states) Managing feelings and emotions	Self-regulation Goal-directed task persistence Cognitive flexibility Organization Time management

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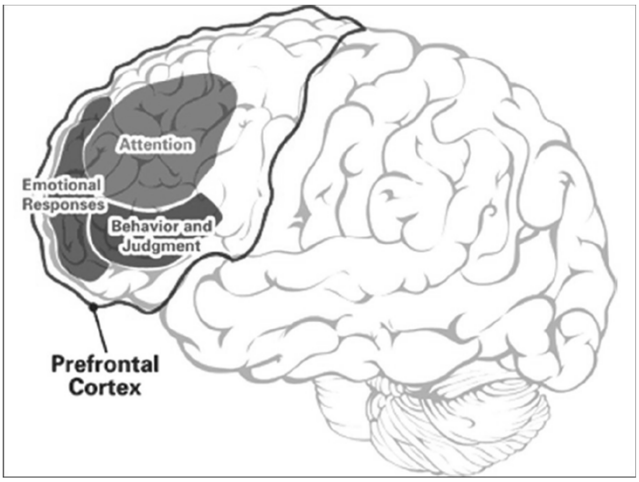
Executive Brain Functions
(Makes Them Better Able to Get Things Done or to Live Well)

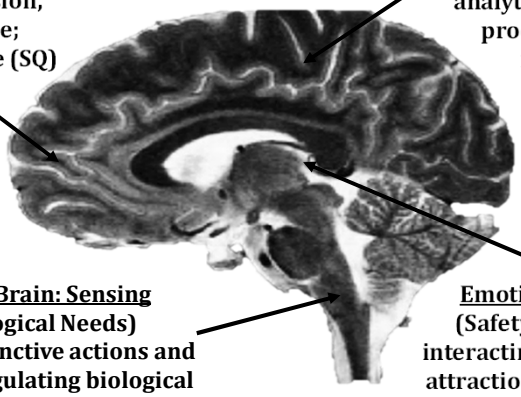
- **Attention (concentrating and focusing on certain things)**
- **Planning (conscious focusing and judgment)**
- **Task Initiation (starting a behavior or action)**
- **Inhibitory Control (managing emotional responses)**
- **Performance Monitoring (correcting and directing behavior)**



Four Brains and Four Levels of Experiencing and Developing
(Sparks Activate Development of Executive Brain)

Executive Brain: Willing
(Self-Actualization Needs)
intention, goal-directedness, self-knowledge; vision, meaning, purpose; spiritual intelligence (SQ)

Thinking Brain: Thinking
(Esteem Needs)
creativity, imagination, analytical logic; information processing; intellectual intelligence (IQ)



Primitive Brain: Sensing
(Physiological Needs)
reflexive/instinctive actions and responses; regulating biological functions; stress/survival response; bodily intelligence (BQ)

Emotional Brain: Feeling
(Safety/Belonging Needs)
interacting, relating, aversion & attraction; pleasure & pain; joy & sadness; emotional intelligence (EQ)

Development of Executive Function Naturally Impacts Performance Across Multiple Areas

Percentage of Youth Having Outcomes, By Levels of Sparks Index

Performance Areas	High	Low
Goals to master what they study at school.	69%	41%
Very often work up to their ability at school.	45%	30%
Have a GPA of 3.5 (B+) or higher.	70%	51%
A sense of purpose and hope for their future.	48%	17%
Believe it is important to help others.	57%	36%
Believe it is important to engage in community.	42%	32%

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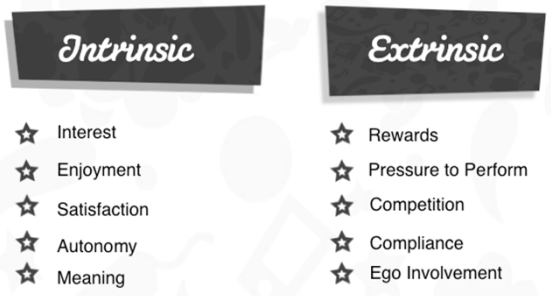
Knowing and Experiencing Your Sparks

1. You can do it or learn it easily.
2. You feel strong when you do it.
3. It comes naturally to you.
4. It brings joy to you and others.
5. You look forward to doing it.
6. You feel like you're "in the zone" when you do it.
7. Time seems to fly when you're doing it.
8. After you've expressed or used it you feel fulfilled.
9. After you've expressed or used it you look forward to doing it again.



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Exercise
Recognizing Your Sparks and How You Thrive

1. **Think of your childhood and try to recall things you were naturally drawn to and activities that gave you joy.**
2. **Think about what you deeply enjoy doing now; things you "really get into doing" or that you're passionate about and easily excel at doing.**
3. **What do you think or know are some of your Sparks?**
4. **How might knowing and using your Sparks help you when working with youth?**

Module 2: Understanding the Nature of *Human Nature* (Much More Than Selfish Drives, Troublesome Impulses, and Unbridled Instincts)

Our Children are Born With an Authentic Self

(Sparks are Clues to the Authentic Self)

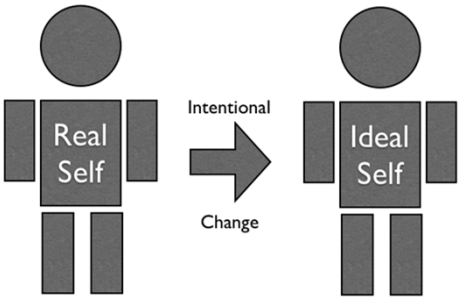
"I want us to envision that what children go through has to do with finding a place in the world for their specific calling. They are trying to live two lives at once, the one they were born with and the one of the place and among the people they were born into."

"All of a sudden and out of nowhere a child shows who she is, what he must do. These impulsions of destiny frequently are stifled, so that calling appears in the myriad symptoms of difficult, self-destructive, accident-prone, 'hyper' children – all words invented by adults in defense of their misunderstanding."

James Hillman
The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling

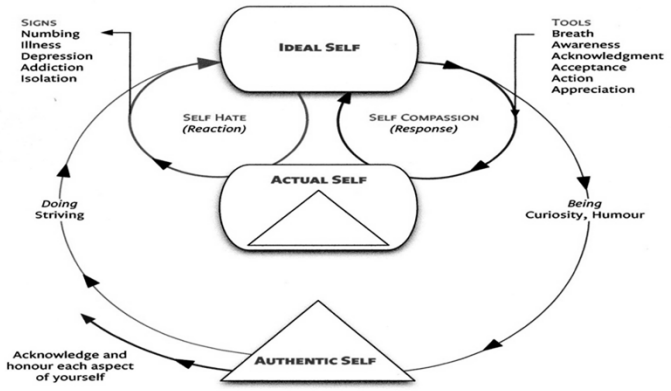
Therefore Youth Naturally Seek to Discover Their Authentic Selves

- **A consuming life task of the adolescent is to discover or construct <u>ideal possible</u> selves that reflect one's potentials (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987; Greene, 1986).**
- **For many youth this task is beset with <u>frustration</u> and failure (Blos, 1967; Erikson, 1968; Flavell, 1963; Harter, 1983).**
- **Through rebellious and delinquent activity, youth can <u>define themselves</u> as adventurous, independent, powerful, tough, or in control and bring one <u>prestige</u> among one's peers (Hirshi, 1969; Sutherland & Cressey, 1978).**



The Selves Model

Higher Executive Function: Forming an Image of One's Ideal Self



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Three Selves Defined

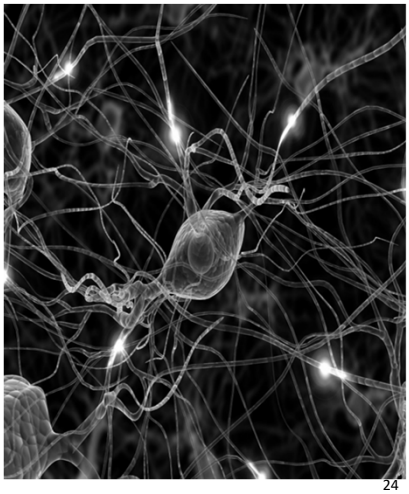
1. **<u>Authentic Self</u>: Basic nature that is unique to each individual; contains the entire potential of what the person might in time become (e.g., innate abilities, gifts, passions, interests, talents, strengths, "sparks", "core personality").**
2. **<u>Ideal Self</u>: Mental image of what one wills or intends to become; initially based on external expectations (i.e., parents, church, etc.); subsequently based on autonomous choice and self-knowledge; supports self-actualization when based on some degree of knowledge of Authentic Self.**
3. **<u>Actual or Real Self</u>: Daily, real-time behavior; can reflect extent to which Authentic Self is surrendered, suppressed, or denied; or extent to which discovering and actualizing Authentic Self is blocked or thwarted. Thwarted leads to self-hate or self-alienation manifested by ill-being (e.g., numbing, illness, depression, addiction, isolation).**

Module 3: The Brain and Positive Youth Development (Understanding What Our Care Plans Support)

Brain Actually Gets Itself Ready for Certain Critical Experiences: On Which are Based Positive Growth-Oriented Adaptations (Or Thriving)

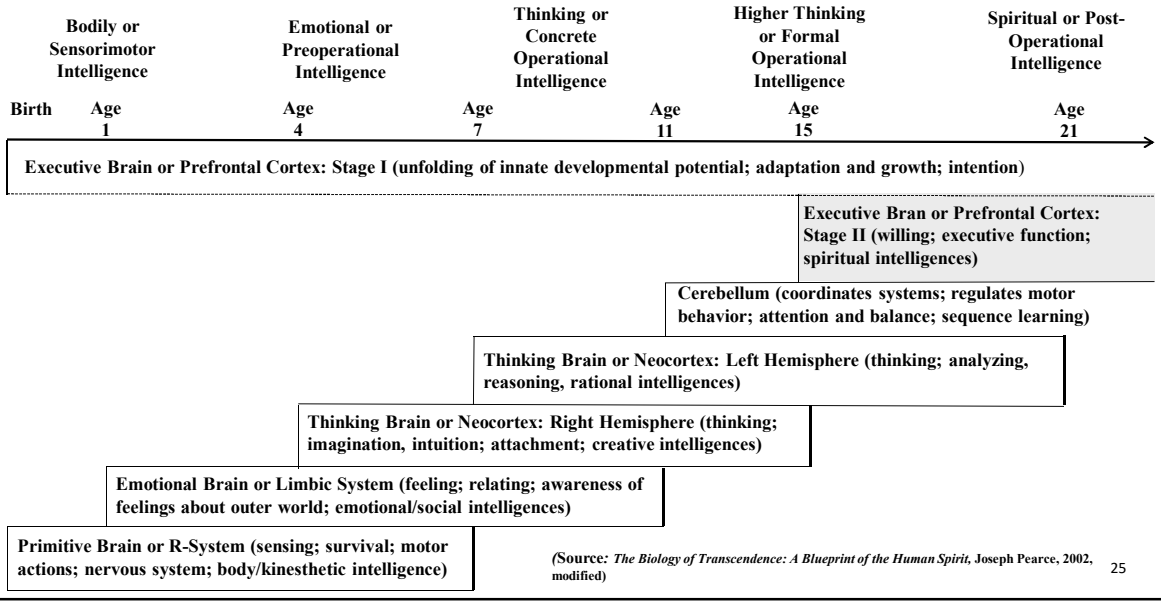
Our brains prepare us to expect certain experiences by forming the pathways needed to respond to those experiences. If the appropriate exposure [or experience] does not happen, the pathways developed in anticipation may be discarded. There are sensitive periods for development of certain capabilities; periods when parts of the brain may be most susceptible to particular experiences.

Child Welfare Information Gateway
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
November 2009



Periods of Concentrated Development for Each Brain System

(Child's Brain Prepares Her or Him for Certain Experiences During Each Period)



(Source: *The Biology of Transcendence: A Blueprint of the Human Spirit,* Joseph Pearce, 2002, modified)

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Erikson's Model is Ideal for Understanding What CST Care Plans Support

Presents Sequence of Adaptations Between Self and Environments.
Big Task of Adolescent Brain-Mind Is to Integrate All Previous Adaptations into an Identity.

Stages of Development	Adaptation Crises	Self-Defining Questions	Virtues (When Adaptations are Positive)
Infancy (Age 0-1)	Trust vs Mistrust	Can I trust the world?	Hope
Early Childhood (Age 1-3)	Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt	Is it okay to be me?	Will
Preschool Age (Age 3-6)	Initiative vs Guilt	Is it okay for me to do, move, and act?	Purpose
School Age (Age 6-12)	Industry vs Inferiority	Can I make it in the world of people and things?	Competence
Adolescence (Age 13-19)	Identity vs Role Confusion	Who am I? Who can I be? What is my ideal/best self?	Fidelity

Module 4: Collaborative Planning and Care Provision to Help Youth Thrive: The Importance of Growth Goals

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Balancing Two Perspectives

Behavioral Perspective	Developmental Perspective
What the child or youth did.	What the child or youth has experienced.
Get the child or youth to behave.	Engage the child or youth to thrive.
What the child or youth needs to do or must do to improve her/his behavior.	What the child or youth needs to experience to realize his/her potential.
Fix what's wrong. Flaws.	Engage with what's right. Sparks.
Care Plan: Behavioral Goals	Care Plan: Growth Goals

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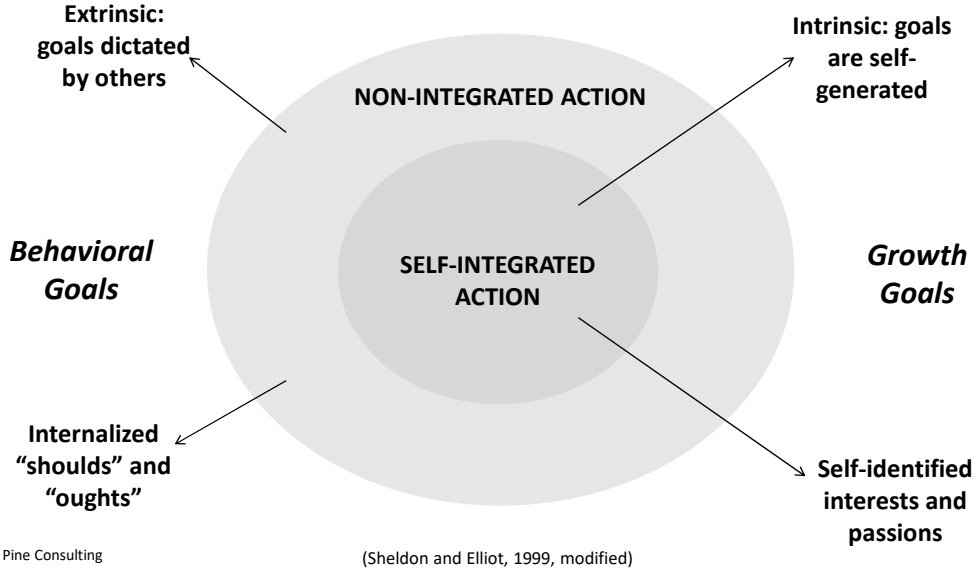
How Good Goals Support Thriving
(Engaging the Youth to Ensure Inclusion of Self-Concordant Goals)

(Sheldon and Elliot, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1999, Vol. 67, No. 3)

Goal Self-Concordance: Degree to which the goals express the youth's enduring interests, values, passions. Motivation to pursue them is intrinsic, not externally prompted or coerced.

Need Satisfying Experiences (Or Meaningful Experiences): Qualities of experience required by human beings in order to thrive; these qualities include competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

Goal Self-Concordance Facilitates Thriving: Self-Integrated Action!



(Sheldon and Elliot, 1999, modified)

Expressions of Thriving
(Some Developmental Outcomes When Sparks are Known, Valued, and Used)

1. Competence
2. Character
3. Connection
4. Confidence
5. Caring
6. Contributing

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Competence

Social Skills	Life Skills	Emotional Competence
• Ability to interact with different kinds of people • Verbal and nonverbal communication	• Everyday skills needed for daily life tasks • Critical thinking, goal-setting, planning • Healthy habits; care of body	• Manage one's emotions, cope with stress, delay gratification • Adjusting one's emotions to be sensitive to others

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Connections

Positive Relationships	Spiritual Growth
• Connections with others in which one feels encouraged and supported	• Growing the intrinsic capacity for self-transcendence • Shaped within or outside religious traditions, beliefs, and practices

(University of California, Davis, 2010)

Character

Character
• A sense of right and wrong or integrity • Respect for appropriate social rules and for correct behavior

(University of California, Davis, 2010)

Caring

Caring
• A sense of empathy and sympathy toward others • Honoring and protecting living things; standing up for fairness and freedom

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Confidence

Persistent Resourcefulness
• Ability to face challenges and learn lessons from them • Finding creative solutions to problems; finding people and resources who can help

Confidence
• Sense of positive identity or self-worth; self-efficacy • Belief in the future

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Contribution

Purpose

- **A deep reason, sense of inspiration, or meaning that can motivate an individual to learn and achieve**
- **Reaching beyond self to a desire to contribute to the world**

(University of California, Davis, 2010)