



Beyond the Family

How Itasca area adults
can—and do—create caring,
strong connections with youth

INTRODUCTION

The leaders and residents of the Itasca area are committed to building stronger futures for all young people who grow up here. One way each and every adult can be part of that vision is to connect with young people in our communities.

To help us each find and commit to actions that will make a difference, the SPARK Council commissioned Search Institute to analyze survey data* that were collected from 2,357 students (grades 7 to 12) in 11 schools in the Itasca area in 2014. The new analysis focused on the roles that adults beyond the family play in helping young people learn, grow, and thrive.

This booklet presents these findings and invites you to discover new ways you can connect and make a difference with and for Itasca area youth.



INSIGHT #1:

Strong relationships with adults beyond the family are critical for youth success.

Positive, well-rounded, and trustworthy relationships begin in the home with parenting adults and siblings. Those are foundational. In addition, young people need strong relationships with friends, teachers, employers, youth workers, neighbors, religious leaders, and others. A vast body of research highlights the importance of these relationships in young people's lives, guiding them on their pathways to a positive future.

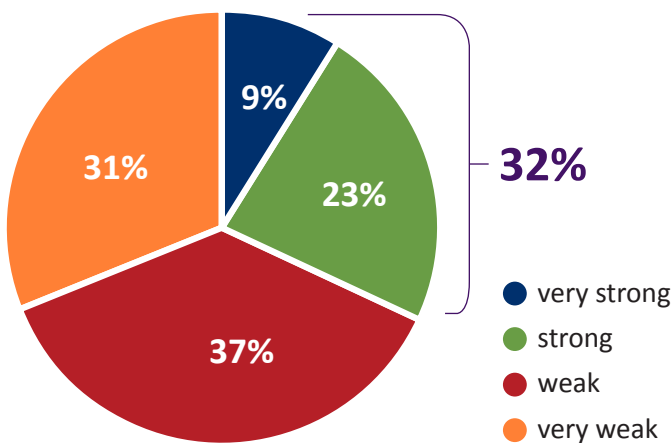
*See page 7 for more details on the survey data. Or visit www.sparkfutures.org/numbers-reports



INSIGHT #2:

Most Itasca area youth lack strong relationships with adults beyond their families.

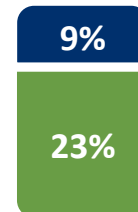
Too few Itasca area youth experience positive relationships with adults beyond their families. The greatest gaps are for older youth and youth whose families have a hard time making ends meet.



ALL YOUTH: Only one in three Itasca area youth (32%) experience strong relationships with adults beyond their families. Strong relationships are those where youth score high on a combination of 15 survey questions.*

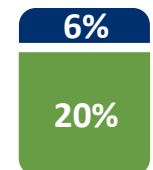


pre-teens (< 13)



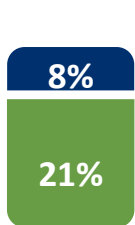
early teens (13-15)

Only 1 in 4 report strong relationships.

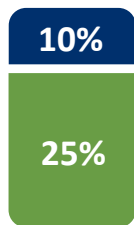


late teens (16-18)

AGE: Older youth are less likely than younger youth to experience strong non-family adult relationships.

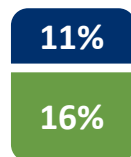


males

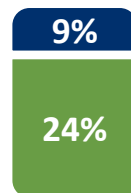


females

GENDER: Males are less likely than females to experience strong relationships with adults beyond their families.

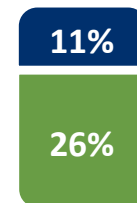


Native youth

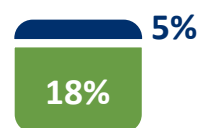


other youth

RACE/ETHNICITY: Native youth are less likely to experience strong relationships with non-family adults than non-Native youth.



don't struggle financially



struggle financially

FINANCIAL STRAIN: Youth whose families struggle with money are less likely to have strong relationships with non-family adults.

* For information on how "strong relationships" are defined and measured, see "Behind The Numbers" on page 7.

INSIGHT #3:

Youth are more likely to thrive when they experience strong relationships with adults beyond their families.

When they have strong relationships with non-family adults, Itasca area youth are more likely to be on a positive path to the future. They:



Set personal learning goals in school.



Care about school and invest in their own learning.



Are confident they can learn, even when it's hard.



Have skills to be effective in the workplace.

BEYOND THE HEADLINE: Statistical analyses provide evidence that strong relationships with non-family adults are associated with better youth outcomes. We calculated* how much more likely youth are to report strengths related to education and workforce readiness if they have strong relationships with non-family adults, shown below. The associations between relationships and these personal strengths hold true for all subgroups of young people in the Itasca area.

If youth have strong relationships with non-family adults, they are...

21% more likely... **to set personal learning goals**

Youth have goals to learn and grow in school.

18% more likely... **to be committed to learning**

Youth report caring about school, doing homework, enjoying learning, and wanting to do well in school.

16% more likely... **to have everyday workplace skills**

Youth know how to communicate, get along with different people, use a computer, and manage money.

14% more likely... **to be confident in their academic abilities**

Youth believe they can learn well in school, even when it is difficult.

*After controlling for gender, grade level, race/ethnicity, and financial strain in the family.

NOTE: These strengths are part of the SPARK Pathway focus on "Demonstrating Competency or Mastery at Current Learning Level" and "Develop Skills to Live, Work, and Thrive in an Ever-Changing World." See p. 41 and 47 of the 2014 *Youth Voice Student Survey Report*.

INSIGHT #4:

Specific elements of relationships are more common than others.






The survey asked young people questions about their relationships with non-family adults. Here are examples of how Itasca area youth responded to questions, organized around Search Institute’s framework of developmental relationships (page 8). The greatest differences in experiences for specific groups of youth are highlighted. (Only meaningful differences are shown.)

NOTEWORTHY: We also looked for differences between youth who lived in towns compared to those who live in rural areas (including farms or reservations). There were no meaningful differences in relationships with non-family adults based on where the youth lived.

Relationship Elements	What Itasca area youth said	Some differences in youth experiences																														
<p>Express Care</p> <p>“Show me that I matter to you.”</p>	<p>44% of Itasca area youth report getting lots of encouragement from five or more adults other than their parents.</p> <p>60% of Itasca area youth have other adults in their life (besides parents) who care about them.</p>	<p>Percent of Itasca area youth who experience a lot of encouragement from five or more adults, by key differences:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <th rowspan="2">Family Financial Strain</th> <th colspan="3">Age</th> </tr> <tr> <th>10-12</th> <th>13-15</th> <th>16-18</th> </tr> <tr> <td>don't struggle</td> <td>50%</td> <td>46%</td> <td>37%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>do struggle</td> <td>35%</td> <td>46%</td> <td>37%</td> </tr> </table> <p>Percent of Itasca area youth who have other adults in their life who care about them, by key differences:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <th rowspan="2">Family Financial Strain</th> <th colspan="3">Age</th> </tr> <tr> <th>10-12</th> <th>13-15</th> <th>16-18</th> </tr> <tr> <td>don't struggle</td> <td>46%</td> <td>44%</td> <td>32%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>do struggle</td> <td>35%</td> <td>44%</td> <td>32%</td> </tr> </table>	Family Financial Strain	Age			10-12	13-15	16-18	don't struggle	50%	46%	37%	do struggle	35%	46%	37%	Family Financial Strain	Age			10-12	13-15	16-18	don't struggle	46%	44%	32%	do struggle	35%	44%	32%
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<p>Challenge Growth</p> <p>“Push me to keep getting better.”</p>	<p>24% of Itasca area youth say neighbors watch out for them, helping them stay on track and make positive choices.</p>	<p>Percent of Itasca area youth who say they have neighbors who look out for them, by key differences:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <th rowspan="2">Gender</th> <th colspan="3">Age</th> </tr> <tr> <th>10-12</th> <th>13-15</th> <th>16-18</th> </tr> <tr> <td>male</td> <td>21%</td> <td>24%</td> <td>18%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>female</td> <td>27%</td> <td>24%</td> <td>18%</td> </tr> </table>	Gender	Age			10-12	13-15	16-18	male	21%	24%	18%	female	27%	24%	18%															
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<p>Provide Support</p> <p>“Help me complete tasks and achieve goals.”</p>	<p>51% of Itasca area youth say they have adults who are good role models for them.</p>	<p>Percent of Itasca area youth who have good adult role models, by key differences:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <th rowspan="2">Family Financial Strain</th> <th colspan="3">Age</th> <th colspan="2">Race/Ethnicity</th> </tr> <tr> <th>10-12</th> <th>13-15</th> <th>16-18</th> <th>Native</th> <th>other</th> </tr> <tr> <td>don't struggle</td> <td>58%</td> <td>52%</td> <td>44%</td> <td>40%</td> <td>53%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>do struggle</td> <td>42%</td> <td>52%</td> <td>44%</td> <td>40%</td> <td>53%</td> </tr> </table>	Family Financial Strain	Age			Race/Ethnicity		10-12	13-15	16-18	Native	other	don't struggle	58%	52%	44%	40%	53%	do struggle	42%	52%	44%	40%	53%							
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<p>Share Power</p> <p>“Treat me with respect and give me a say.”</p>	<p>16% of Itasca area youth strongly agree that they matter to people in their town or community.</p> <p>Itasca area youth who say adults: Make them feel important: 17% Listen to them: 15%</p>	<p>Percent of Itasca area youth who strongly agree that they matter to people in their town or community, by key differences:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <th rowspan="2">Race/Ethnicity</th> <th colspan="3">Age</th> </tr> <tr> <th>10-12</th> <th>13-15</th> <th>16-18</th> </tr> <tr> <td>Native</td> <td>22%</td> <td>15%</td> <td>15%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>other</td> <td>16%</td> <td>15%</td> <td>15%</td> </tr> </table> <p>Percent of Itasca area youth who say adults in their community make them feel important, by key differences:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <th rowspan="2">Race/Ethnicity</th> <th colspan="3">Age</th> </tr> <tr> <th>10-12</th> <th>13-15</th> <th>16-18</th> </tr> <tr> <td>Native</td> <td>24%</td> <td>17%</td> <td>13%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>other</td> <td>16%</td> <td>17%</td> <td>13%</td> </tr> </table>	Race/Ethnicity	Age			10-12	13-15	16-18	Native	22%	15%	15%	other	16%	15%	15%	Race/Ethnicity	Age			10-12	13-15	16-18	Native	24%	17%	13%	other	16%	17%	13%
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<p>Expand Possibilities</p> <p>“Connect me with people and places that broaden my world.”</p>	<p>Itasca area youth who say each group of non-parent adults “often” helps or encourage them develop their interests, talents, skills, or goals for the future:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 38% A coach or program leader 28% Teachers, counselors, or other school adults 21% A leader in a faith community 15% Neighbors 13% A mentor 	<p>RESULTS ARE SIMILAR FOR ALL GROUPS OF YOUTH</p> <p>Differences in youth experiencing help with developing interests and goals varied little for different subgroups of youth.</p>																														

STARTING POINTS FOR ACTION: Try one or more of these ideas for enriching your relationships with young people.

Adults who encounter young people outside of their family every day in the schools, programs, and other settings have **unique opportunities to build developmental relationships**. Which of these ideas are you already doing? Which additional ideas could enrich your relationships?

Relationship Elements	All Adults	Teachers	Youth Program Leaders
 <p>Express Care</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pay attention. Focus on youth when they are talking about things that matter to them. Put away your cell phone. 2. Make time for lightness. Share in some humor, fun, and laughter amid the practical tasks. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Strive to understand and show sensitivity to students' feelings. 12. Use varied teaching strategies to make learning enjoyable, and to help students connect with you and each other. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 21. Work to understand young people's points of view when they share ideas or opinions. 22. Do what you say you will do, and keep your promises.
 <p>Challenge Growth</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Highlight future goals. Talk with young people about the things they look forward to or dream about. 4. Emphasize mistakes are a necessary part of learning. Praise them for hard work, whether they succeed or fail. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Emphasize mastery and self-improvement more so than doing better than other students. 14. Challenge students to reach high expectations. Hold them accountable. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 23. Challenge young people to try things that are a little hard for them to do. 24. Help young people find their own solutions, rather than just telling them what to do.
 <p>Provide Support</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Offer information and practical help to solve a practical problem, or loan them something they may need. 6. Show young people how to ask for help when they need it. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 15. Provide specific and descriptive feedback for students to use toward their improvement. 16. Teach strategies for performing and learning under pressure. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 25. Help young people think through options and resources when they encounter obstacles. 26. Show young people how to ask for help when they need it.
 <p>Share Power</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Let young people make decisions about activities you do together and what you talk about. 8. When you can, offer choices ("So, what could you do differently to tackle this problem?"), rather than always giving instructions. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Give students classroom choices within rules and safety limits. 18. Ask students for input on assignments, class content, and how they can show proficiency. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 27. Provide opportunities for young people to lead programs based on their interests. 28. Emphasize building community and serving others through youth-initiated projects.
 <p>Expand Possibilities</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. When young people seem curious about an activity, topic, or issue, ask questions such as "what strikes you about this?" 10. Introduce young people to a wide range of people, places, ideas, cultures, and vocations. Start with ones they're curious about. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 19. Demonstrate how what students are learning relates to their interests and to success outside of school and in the future. 20. Connect students with educators, other students, and community members who can explore with them areas of personal interest and strength. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 29. Introduce young people to other cultures, ideas, and places that help them discover their place in the world. 30. Model being a curious learner by asking questions and sharing what you're learning in your own life.

Excerpted from: Roehlkepartain, E. C., Pekel, K., Syvertsen, A. K., Sethi, J., Sullivan, T. K., & Scales, P. C. (2017). *Relationships First: Creating Connections that Help Young People Thrive*. Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute. Download from: <http://page.search-institute.org/relationships-first>

BEHIND THE NUMBERS:

These details can help you understand the research behind the four key findings presented in this booklet.

This booklet is based on new analyses of *The Youth Voice Student Survey*, which was administered in Fall 2014 with 2,357 students (grades 7 to 12) in Itasca area schools. For more information, including demographics of the sample, visit www.sparkfutures.org/numbers-reports/

How We Measured Non-Family Adult Relationships

This booklet uses analyses of 15 survey questions that focused on relationships with non-family adults. When pulled together, they create an overall measure of relationships with non-family adults that approximates the five key elements of Search Institute's Developmental Relationships Framework. These items are:

How many adults have you known for two or more years who ...

1. Give you lots of encouragement whenever they see you?
2. You look forward to spending time with?
3. Talk with you at least once a month?

Related Element
of Developmental
Relationships

Express Care

Express Care

Express Care

Thinking about now and the past three months, how true is each statement for you?

4. I have good neighbors who care about me. (Neighbors are people who live near to you.)
5. I have other adults in my life—who are not my parents—who care about me.
6. I have neighbors who help watch out for me.
7. I have adults who are good role models for me.
8. Adults in my community make me feel important.
9. Adults in my community listen to what I have to say.
10. In my town or community, I feel like I matter to people.

Express Care

Express Care

Challenge Growth

Provide Support

Share Power

Share Power

Share Power

How often do each of these people help or encourage you to develop your interests, talents, skills, or goals for the future?

11. Teachers, counselors, or other adults at your school
12. A leader in a religious organization
13. A coach or other adult in a youth organization or after school program
14. A mentor
15. Your neighbors (Neighbors are people who live near to you.)

Expand Possibilities

Expand Possibilities

Expand Possibilities

Expand Possibilities

Expand Possibilities



This booklet was prepared by Search Institute for **SPARK: Stronger Futures for All** (www.sparkfutures.org). SPARK leverages data, community aspiration and collaborative action to help all learn and thrive.

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SPARK and the Search Institute are funded in part by the Blandin Foundation.

BACKGROUND:

Search Institute’s Framework of Developmental Relationships

The idea of “strong relationships” in this brief is based on Search Institute’s research-based framework of developmental relationships. A developmental relationship involves a dynamic mix of five elements, which are expressed through 20 actions. Some of these were captured in the Itasca Area Youth Voices survey.

Relationship Elements	Actions	Definitions
 <p>Express Care</p> <p>“Show me that I matter to you.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be dependable • Listen • Believe in me • Be warm • Encourage 	<p>Be someone I can trust.</p> <p>Really pay attention when we are together.</p> <p>Make me feel known and valued.</p> <p>Show me you enjoy being with me.</p> <p>Praise me for my efforts and achievements.</p>
 <p>Challenge Growth</p> <p>“Push me to keep getting better.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expect my best • Stretch • Hold me accountable • Reflect on failures 	<p>Expect me to live up to my potential.</p> <p>Push me to go further.</p> <p>Insist I take responsibility.</p> <p>Help me to learn from mistakes and setbacks.</p>
 <p>Provide Support</p> <p>“Help me complete tasks and achieve goals.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigate • Empower • Advocate • Set boundaries 	<p>Guide me through hard situations and systems.</p> <p>Build my confidence to take charge of my life.</p> <p>Defend me when I need it.</p> <p>Put in place limits that keep me on track.</p>
 <p>Share Power</p> <p>“Treat me with respect and give me a say.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect me • Include me • Collaborate • Let me lead 	<p>Take me seriously and treat me fairly.</p> <p>Involve me in decisions that affect me.</p> <p>Work with me to solve problems and reach goals.</p> <p>Create opportunities for me to take action and lead.</p>
 <p>Expand Possibilities</p> <p>“Connect me with people and places that broaden my world.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspire • Broaden horizons • Connect 	<p>Inspire me to see possibilities for my future.</p> <p>Expose me to new ideas, experiences and places.</p> <p>Introduce me to more people who can help me grow.</p>

NOTE: Because relationships are, by definition, bidirectional, each person in a strong relationship engages in and experiences each of these actions. However, for the purpose of clarity, this framework is expressed from the perspective of one young person.