

Identifying Strengths Reflection

Recommended Age: 12+

Goals

- To provide a tool for youth to describe people, activities, and things in their lives that give them strength.
- To introduce the importance of having and/or building a positive support system.

Have Ready

- Hand out sheets of paper (poster size optional) and pens/markers.

Activity Introduction

- Youth who are actively engaged in substance use are often surrounded by others who are also using or at risk for using. This may include friends, peers, or family members. A key tool is to have youth expand their social support network, as well as reflect on their own sources of strength in working toward quitting or cutting down.

Instructions

- Ask youth, **“Think of a list of people and activities in your lives that give you strength or support.”** These people or activities are ones that help us make healthy decisions in hard times. We want to focus on positive supports and people or things that help us with healing. The lists should include people or things that help us feel good about ourselves and help us handle stress.
- Next, ask youth, **“Write about or draw one of the things on your list.”** Encourage youth to draw a picture, write a song or poem, or simply journal about why this person or activity is so important to

them. Let youth know that they won't have to share what they created with anyone.

- Facilitators can walk around and help youth or encourage them. Facilitators can also remind youth that they can draw a picture of a person, activity, or ceremony that brings them strength.
- If anyone seems to be struggling, point out that some common areas to explore are family supports, positive friends, a mentor in their life, volunteering or helping others, spending time with younger people, taking part in spiritual ceremonies or practices, counselling, going to group meetings (e.g., AA or NA), visiting a Lodge, or an Elder.

Debrief

- Let youth know, **“Surrounding ourselves with positive people can help us through hard times, as well as help us make healthier decisions when it comes to substance use.”** Think about how it feels to hear encouraging words. Even if that person can't 'fix' the difficult time we are going through, it is important to find people who care for us without judging us. Even if you only have one person in your life, it can make a huge difference in helping us feel good about ourselves. If this area was limited or it was hard to name a person, then we know that this is an area to work on in our lives. Sometimes, this means separating from our friends in order to connect with people who are encouraging and positive.
- **Tell youth that the activities they identified are important because they can see that even in times when friends or family aren't available, they can draw from their own sources of strength.** Those activities are not just hobbies; rather, they are protective factors that help us not only get through rough times, but possibly give us a break from using substances. If this area was limited or it was hard to come up with activities that are positive, then that is an area to work on in our lives. Debrief that something as simple as volunteering some of your time at an afterschool program or hanging out with younger people can provide us with a feeling of connection, as well as give us an important job or role to play in others' lives.