

Youth Engagement:  
**Opening the Door  
to Difficult  
Conversations**

Toolkit

Module 5:  
**Finding My  
Strengths**



## Opening the Door to Difficult Conversations Toolkit© Module 5: Finding My Strengths

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# Opening the Door to Difficult Conversations Toolkit

## Module 5: Finding My Strengths

Please note, community standards should be set (see Module 1) before beginning this module. If you chose to use Activity 2 in this module, please go through the activities in Module 4 first.

### Background

This module focuses on self-image, self-appreciation, and societal expectations. Pressures around body image and the way one should look can have a negative impact on youth's self-esteem, well-being, and mental health. For Saskatchewan youth, having a negative body image increases the likelihood of self-reporting depressive symptoms, self-harm, and/or suicidal behaviours; while having a positive body image may function as a protective factor for youths' mental health (SAYCW, 2019). The aim of this activity is for group participants to consider how they identify with the expectations and pressures they experience, and practice countering the negative beliefs they have internalized.

### Materials

- Paper and pens for each person
- Markers and sticky notes
- Flipchart or whiteboard
- Marker for above

### Objectives

- Promote youth's self-appreciation.
- Support youth in transforming negative self-talk that arises from societal pressures.

### Activity 1: Celebrating Self-Image

#### Part One: Discovering Positive Identity

For this part of the activity, distribute pens and paper to all participants. Ask youth to write down three to five positive words that describe them. These can be related to qualities, strengths, attributes, or anything else. Allow participants some time to self-reflect and complete this task.

**Facilitator's Tip:** Some youth might not find it easy to come up with descriptors on their own, especially positive descriptors. Write down a few prompts on the flipchart or whiteboard (e.g., patient, collaborative, caring, good friend, and thoughtful). Keep in mind that not everyone prefers to express themselves in words. Allow youth alternative forms of expression through art, poetry, or any other way they wish to complete this activity.

#### Part Two: Celebrating Strengths

Ask youth to come together in a circle once they have finished the first part of the activity. Encourage them to share what they wrote down. If they wish to share, ask them why they selected these words and how

they make them special. Offer positive reinforcement by affirming the descriptors mentioned and allow space for other participants to do so as well.

Ask some probing questions to have a debrief conversation about this activity.

- 1- How did it feel to share the descriptors you wrote down?
- 2- How did it feel to hear words of encouragement from others?

This is a good time to talk about the power of self-appreciation and the importance of celebrating individuality and supporting others to celebrate themselves as well.

### Part Three (Optional): Strengths United

For this part, suggest for youth to collaborate in creating a collage, art piece, or image from the descriptors they created in Part One. For larger groups, consider splitting youth into smaller groups to allow everyone a chance to participate. Allow youth a chance to discuss their final product with each other in the small group or with the whole group if they wish to do so. Post the final products somewhere visible so that they can serve as a reminder of the individual and the collective strengths of the youth.

### **Activity 2: Rewriting Self-Talk**

Begin by connecting this activity to Module 4 (Pressures Youth Face). Discuss how societal pressures can impact the way we see ourselves. Sometimes, this may translate into negative self-talk.

Allow participants some time to reflect and write down examples of their own negative self-talk. Ask them to think back to the societal pressures they identified in the previous module and how the pressures may have influenced their self-talk.

After youth have had the chance to finish writing down their thoughts, tell them it is time to rewrite the self-talk utilizing the positive descriptors they identified in Activity 1. For each negative self-talk example identified, ask youth to write down a positive statement that challenges the negative self-talk they have written down.

**Facilitator's Tip:** Ask youth to try to think of ways to reframe the self-talk into affirming, compassionate talk that enhances positive self-perception. For example, if a participant writes down "I will never be able to get a good grade.", positive self-talk would be "I have many skills that make me capable of overcoming and learning from the challenges I face."

After this is done, when everyone is back in the circle, ask participants if they would like to share how they transformed their statements. Ask youth how this activity made them feel and if they faced any challenges while trying to change their internal narrative.

**Facilitator's Tip:** Remember that transforming negative self-talk into positive self-talk might be a challenge and requires a lot of practice. Tell youth that there are many ways that they can nurture a more supportive inner dialogue. For example, if they are having difficulty overcoming negative self-talk, they can ask their

peers, family members, or loved ones to provide them with positive attributes they notice in them as well as supportive reminders about their strengths, achievements, and talents. They may ask questions like: *What do you think I do really well? What do you think makes me unique?* While negative self-talk can be normal, transforming it can be particularly challenging for youth with poor mental health. Be attentive for signs of distress.

If you notice a participant displaying extreme self-criticism, always take it seriously. Try to have a private conversation with them and actively listen to what they have to say. Let them know that you care about them and with their permission, can refer them to the appropriate support.

Remember to empower youth to choose whether they would like to participate in an activity or not.