



Welcome to SPARX training for professionals





Background & Introduction





What does SPARX stand for?



Smart



Positive



Active



Realistic



X-factor Thoughts



What is SPARX?

- ✿ SPARX is an e-therapy program for young people with mild to moderate depression
- ✿ It was designed as a stand-alone self-help intervention that can be accessed online 24/7 in private
- ✿ SPARX was designed to address the gap in treatment options
- ✿ It uses proven cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) techniques to deal with symptoms of depression
- ✿ SPARX was developed in New Zealand for New Zealand youth
- ✿ It uses a youth-friendly format
- ✿ It is free of charge for all New Zealanders



Who is SPARX for?

- ✿ SPARX is for young people
- ✿ Aimed at 12-19 year olds
- ✿ It's for youth experiencing mild to moderate depression (feeling down, stressed, low mood)
- ✿ It can address the issue of young people experiencing depression who are not willing and / or able to access professional help



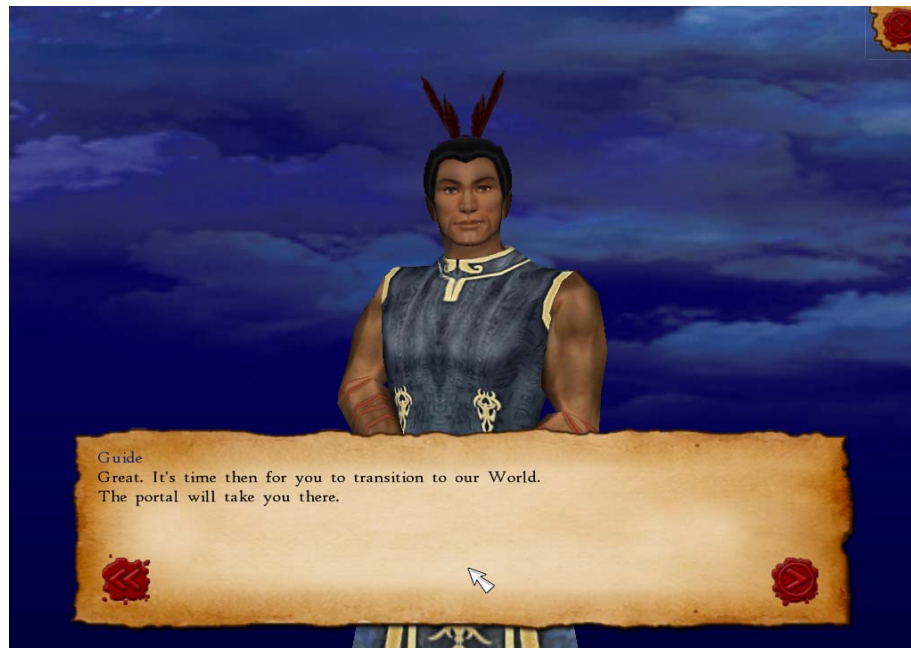
Cultural acceptability of SPARX

- ❁ SPARX was developed in partnership with Maori researchers, clinicians and software developers
- ❁ Research on SPARX acceptability and effectiveness for Maori has been published in a doctoral thesis by Dr Matt Shepherd
- ❁ Pacific and Asian advisors had input throughout the development and testing; and the trials included substantial numbers of all major ethnic groups in New Zealand



SPARX is unique

- ❁ SPARX uses elements of fantasy gaming to engage the user in experiential learning
- ❁ A Guide acts as a 'virtual therapist' to explain how to use skills learnt in the gaming environment in 'real life'





How does SPARX work?

- ❁ At the beginning and end of each module, the user interacts, in the first person, with a character called the 'Guide', who provides psychoeducation, gauges mood and sets and monitors real-life challenges, equivalent to homework.
- ❁ The user is then transported to the 'game world' to undertake interactive challenges.
- ❁ Upon successfully completing each module, the user returns to the Guide who puts the skills learnt in the game world into 'real life' context.



What skills does SPARX cover?

- ❁ Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a treatment based on the premise that thoughts and behaviours influence feelings
- ❁ SPARX includes core CBT strategies for depression
 - Depression and anxiety often occur together
 - We have shown that SPARX works for both
- ❁ Skills are learnt that target symptoms of depression but can also help in dealing with anxiety

THOUGHTS
(How you think)

BEHAVIOUR
(What you do)



HOW YOU FEEL



What skills does SPARX cover?

SPARX uses evidence-based CBT skills that focus on:

- ✿ Scheduling activities
- ✿ Problem solving
- ✿ Learning to recognise automatic thoughts
- ✿ Stopping negative / unhelpful thoughts
- ✿ Changing unhelpful thoughts into helpful ones
- ✿ Relaxation and self-calming techniques
- ✿ Interpersonal and communication skills



SPARX uses CBT skills



Hope. You can change your feelings



Relaxation



Communication, assertiveness, negotiation



Activity scheduling



Strong emotions, anger, mindfulness



Problem solving: STEPS



Identifying and challenging unhelpful thoughts (GNATs)



Identifying and growing SPARX



Who needs more help than SPARX?

- ✿ It is not designed for young people who:
 - experience severe depression
 - are at high risk of self harm or suicide
- ✿ It does not specifically address the problem of self-harm, but SPARX does provide information about where to get more help and support. Usual protocols should be followed for young people at risk of self-harm
- ✿ SPARX does not replace therapy / counselling or medication if those are the preferred treatment options
- ✿ SPARX can be used alongside other interventions



SPARX online

The SPARX website includes the SPARX program and:

- ✿ Background information for young people, their families, whanau and professionals who work with adolescents
- ✿ 'Mood Quiz' (depression screening tool)
- ✿ Information on where to get more help (including support provided by Lifeline and Youthline)



Monitoring progress

- ✿ SPARX includes a mood monitor (Patient Health Questionnaire-9 modified for Adolescents, PHQ-A) at levels 1, 4 and 7
- ✿ The user answers 9 items about recent mood and gets a graph of his / her progress
The user gets prompts from the program to seek more help if their depression rating or risk are high



Emails and text alerts

- ✿ Users can sign up for emails and / or text messages
These are free of charge
- ✿ There are two types of messages:
 1. Reminders to return to SPARX after a period of time
 2. Prompts to get more help based on mood monitor within SPARX



What is e-therapy?

- ❁ e-therapy covers a broad range of psychological and behavioural therapies delivered with the assistance of digital / computer technology
 - Mostly for mild to moderate spectrum of mental health problems
- ❁ Recommended as part of the stepped care approach for depression and anxiety in adults
- ❁ e-therapies can be used as pure self-help, with support from a professional or as an adjunct to face-to-face therapy / counseling



Clinical recommendations

- ✿ The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) in the United Kingdom has recommended computerised cognitive behavioural therapy (cCBT) within stepped-care model of healthcare for adults with depression and/or anxiety in primary care

Guided self-help is one of the treatments recommended by NICE for children and young people with mild depression

- ✿ There is growing evidence internationally that cCBT is effective and safe for children and adolescents

The research on SPARX is in-line with international studies



SPARX has been scientifically evaluated

<http://www.bmj.com/content/344/bmj.e2598>



RCT of SPARX vs. usual care

Open trial of SPARX with Maori
youth

RCT of SPARX with youth
attending Alternative Education

Open trial of Rainbow SPARX
with sexual minority youth



SPARX is award winning

SPARX won two prestigious international awards

- 2013 – SPARX won an international digital award from Netexplo, a ‘global observatory on digital society’, hosted by UNESCO



- 2011 – SPARX won a World Summit Award in the category of e-Health and Environment. The World Summit Awards honour excellence in multimedia and e-Content creation. The World Summit Awards are under the auspices of United Nations



Working with young people





Using SPARX with young people

- ❁ When deciding if SPARX is the right tool for a young person:
 - Carry out a brief depression screen
 - Assess risk of self-harm and suicide
 - Ask the young person if they want to try a computer program or if they would prefer to talk with a helping professional (or do both)
 - Ask if they have access to a computer and broadband (at home, private space at school or library etc).
- ❁ Decide how you are going to follow up and monitor outcome



Safety / risk assessment

- ❁ SPARX has not been designed for young people with high self-harm or suicide risk but it does treat depression which is an underlying risk factor
- ❁ Usual protocols should be followed for young people with high self-harm or suicide risk
- ❁ It is important to carry out a safety assessment before recommending SPARX to a young person
- ❁ If you are supporting someone doing SPARX, use your usual clinical protocol to check safety regularly



Screening for depression using PHQ

If you are using the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) or its modified version for Adolescents (PHQ-A):

- ✿ We recommend SPARX for young people who score 10-19 on this measure
 - Check item 9 to establish risk of self-harm
- ✿ For those scoring below 10, young people still want to use SPARX and there would be no reason to stop them
- ✿ For those scoring above 19 or who endorse item 9 (risk of self-harm) extra support and monitoring is indicated



How to identify who may benefit from SPARX?

- 🌀 SPARX site has a “mood quiz”

Please answer the following questions as honestly as you can to find out your 'mood score'.

PROGRESS 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Over the last two weeks have you been feeling down, depressed, irritable, or hopeless?

☐ Not at all

☐ Several days

☐ More than half the days

☐ Nearly every day

NEXT QUESTION >

- 🌀 Results may be used as a guide for the young person to try SPARX or get more help



Monitoring of outcome

- ✿ SPARX is an intervention for mild to moderate depression and can be used as you might use medication
- ✿ In any treatment for depression it will be important to check in with the young person regularly to make sure that they have improved
- ✿ You would expect improvement in 2-3 weeks
- ✿ As within any any other treatment of depression you can expect substantial improvement for 60-70% of young people and recovery for about 40%
- ✿ For those who don't recover, more in-depth assessment of the overall situation and of their mental health will be needed



Stepped care approach

- ❁ SPARX is designed to be the first step in the stepped care approach
- ❁ For those who don't recover, or for those with more serious depression CBT or interpersonal therapy (IPT) from a trained professional and/or antidepressant medication may be indicated





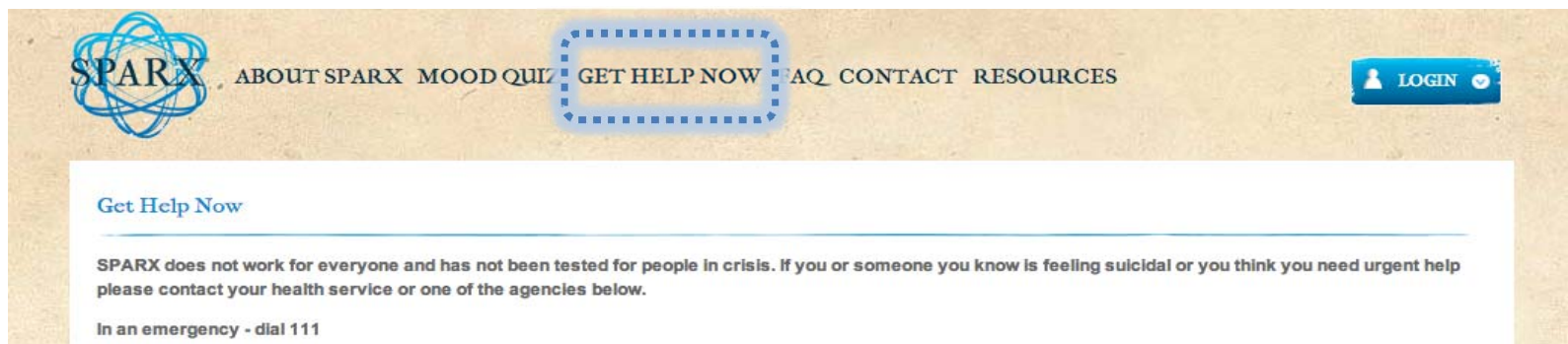
How should SPARX be used to maximise benefits?

- ❁ Most young people will use SPARX independently (as a self-help tool)
- ❁ Some young people will want or need support along the way
There is evidence that users are more likely to complete e-therapy programs when they are supported
- ❁ There are many ways in which SPARX could be integrated into clinical practice
Different methods will work for different people



What help is available to SPARX users?

- ❁ We have partnered up with Lifeline and Youthline to support young people using SPARX
- ❁ Young people can phone a helpline or text for extra counselling or support
Technical support can be requested via the website
- ❁ Our website outlines ways in which young people can get extra help in the community



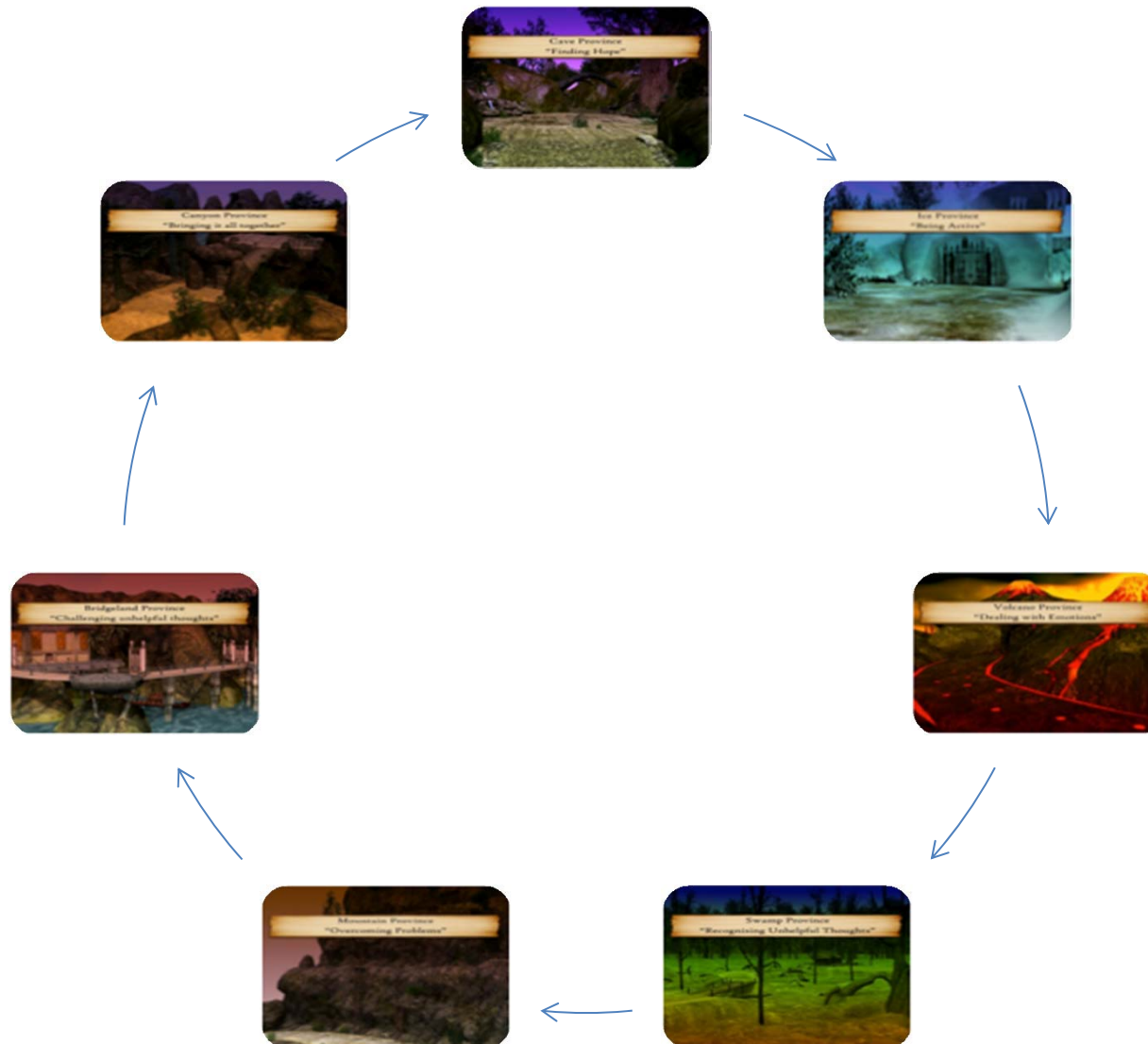


SPARX online self-help tool





SPARX has 7 modules (levels)





Modules

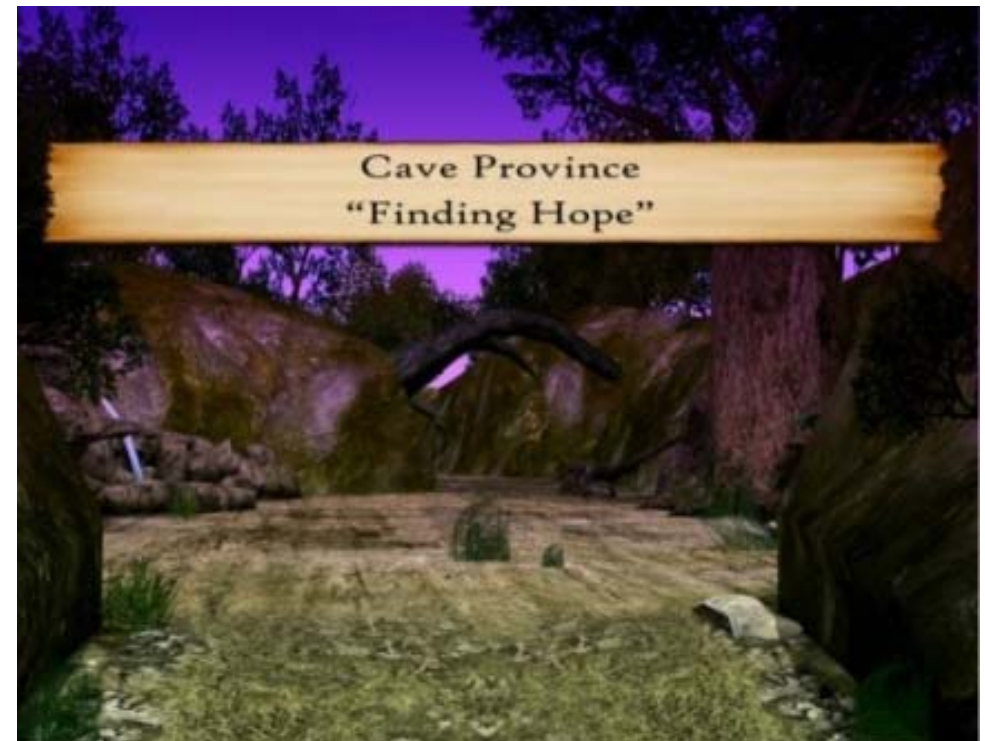
- ✿ Modules are approximately 30 minutes long
- ✿ We suggest doing 1-2 modules a week
 - The system tracks individual's progress
 - It is recommended that not all modules are done at once, to allow young people to practice the skills they learn in the fantasy environment in real life
- ✿ Users can sign up for automated text / email messages



Module 1: Cave Province

“Finding Hope”

- ❁ Psychoeducation about depression and introduction to the CBT model
- ❁ Introducing GNATs (gloomy negative automatic thoughts or unhelpful thoughts)
- ❁ Introducing ‘hope’ (people recover from depression)
- ❁ Relaxation: Controlled breathing





SPARX skills and feature in Level 1

- ❁ Tui (bird of hope) – have hope, remind yourself you'll get through it
- ❁ Relaxation – slow controlled breathing
- ❁ Mind power – start changing your thoughts. You will feel better

Tui
(Bird of Hope)

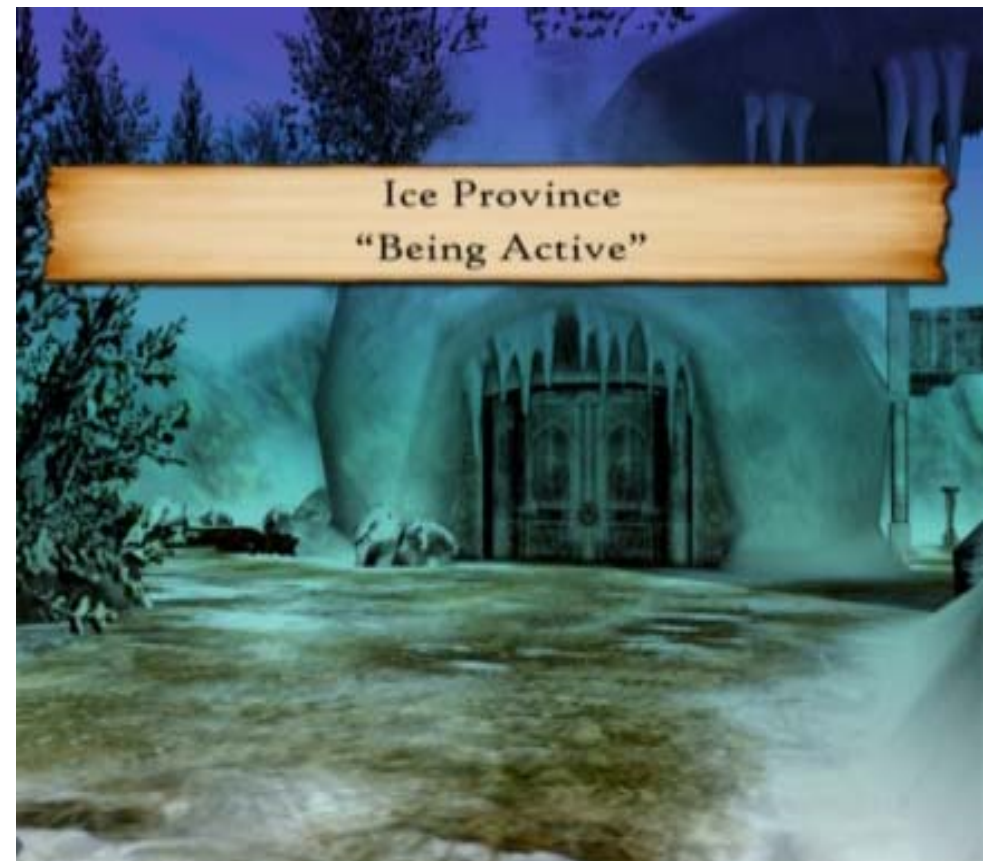




Module 2: Ice Province

“Being Active”

- ❁ Activity scheduling and behavioural activation
- ❁ Relaxation: Progressive muscle relaxation
- ❁ Basic communication and interpersonal skills





SPARX features in Level 2

The Shield (against depression)

User collects different skills throughout SPARX that form the Shield:

1. Relax
2. Sort it
(sort out personal problems)
3. Spot it
(spot the positive and spot the negative)
4. Swap it
(swap negative thoughts for positive thoughts)
5. Solve it
(problem solve)
6. Do it
(be active, do more = feeling better)



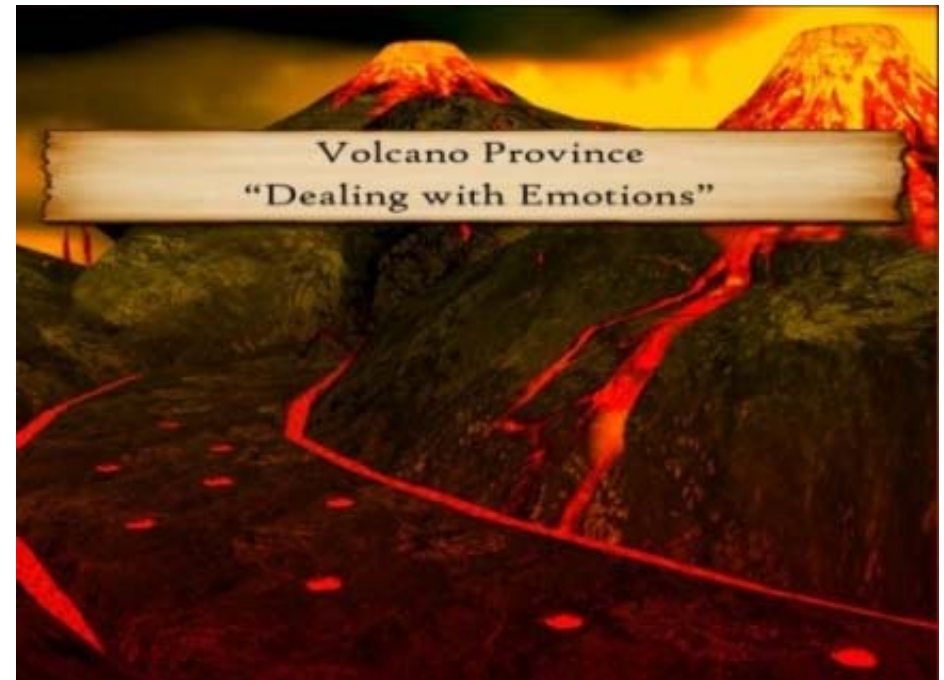
 Get help when you need it



Module 3: Volcano Province

“Dealing with Emotions”

- ❁ Dealing with strong emotions:
hurt feelings and anger
 - Learning about triggers and ways to deal with those
- ❁ Interpersonal skills:
assertiveness, listening and negotiation skills





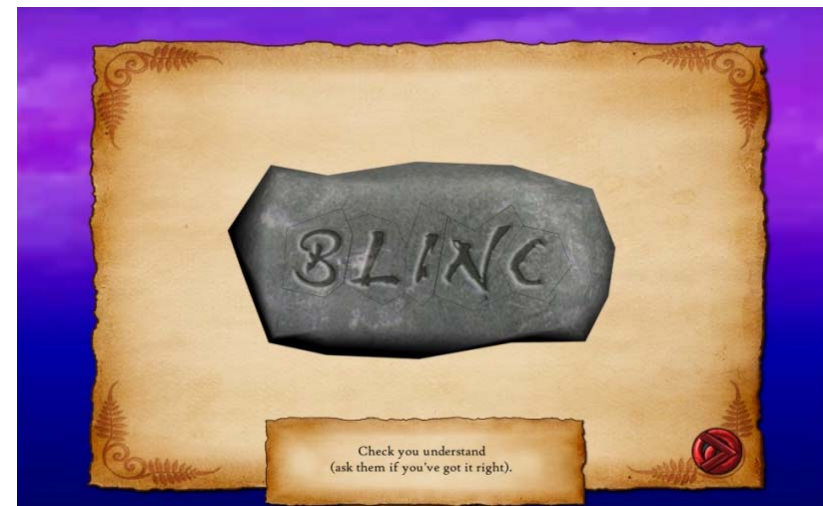
SPARX features in level 3

❁ SPOT IT – spot feelings of anger or hurt and choose how you react

- Distraction
- Stop it / Trash it / Turn it down
- Sort it (calm down, pick a good time and sort it)

❁ BLINC stone - Listen with BLINC

1. Bite your tongue
2. Look at the speaker
3. Be interested
4. No interruptions
5. Check you understand

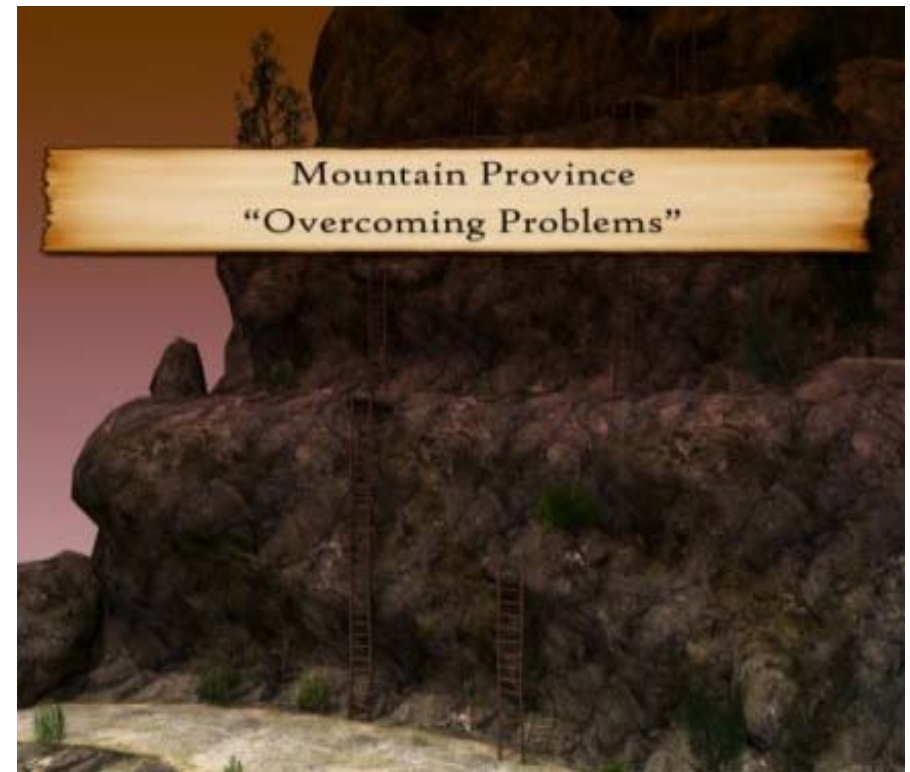




Module 4: Mountain Province

“Overcoming Problems”

- ❁ Problem solving using STEPS
- ❁ Cognitive restructuring: identifying SPARX – positive / helpful thoughts





SPARX features in Level 4



STEPS

1. Say what the problem is
2. Think of solutions
3. Examine these ideas
4. Pick one and try it
5. See what happens



SPARX (Sparks): Positive or helpful thoughts about you and your future. Sparks make you feel good

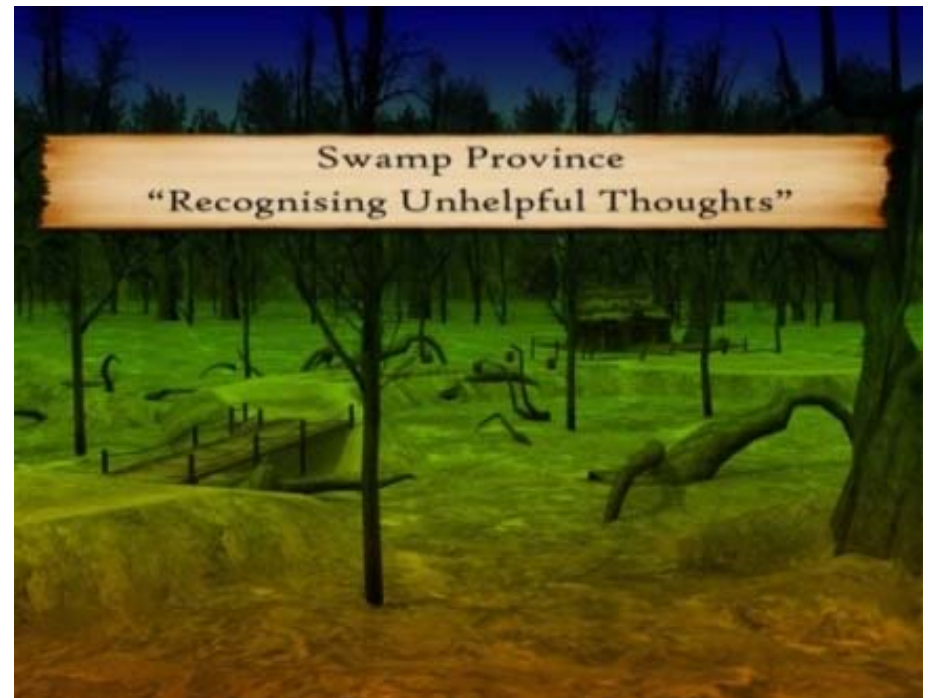
- Smart, Positive, Active, Realistic, X-factor (or Keep'em) thoughts!



Module 5: Swamp Province

“Recognising Unhelpful Thoughts”

- ❁ Cognitive restructuring: recognising different types of GNATs (negative / unhelpful thoughts)





SPARX skills in level 5

How to SPOT a GNAT?

- Downer
(looking at downside / overlooking the positive)
- Perfectionist
(expecting to be perfect)
- Mind reader
(reading other people's minds or predicting the future)
- Guilty
(thinking everything is your fault)
- Disaster
(making it out to be a bigger deal than it is)
- All or nothing
(seeing things in extreme with nothing in between)



GNATs

Gloomy

Negative

Automatic

Thoughts

King of GNATs

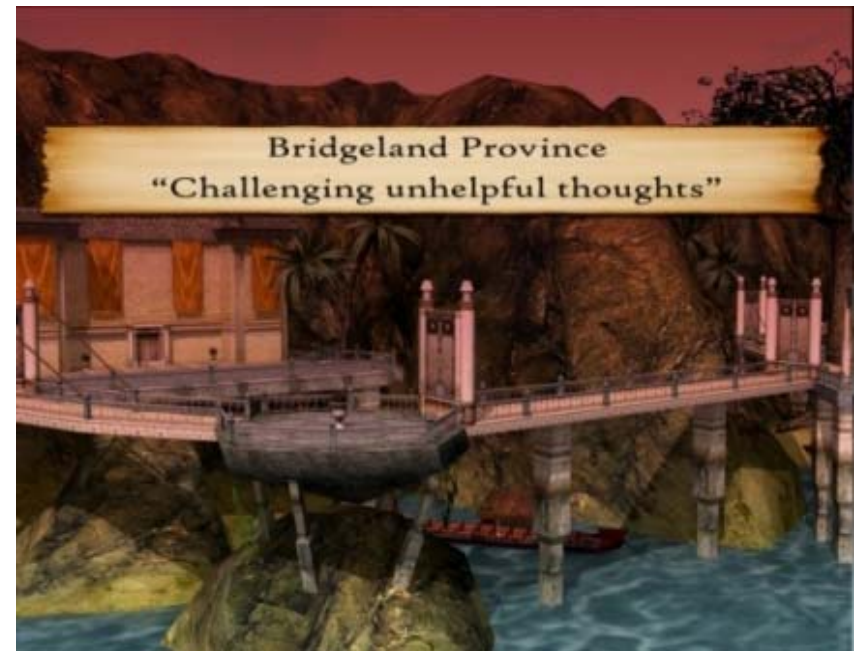




Module 6: Bridgeland Province

“Challenging Unhelpful Thoughts”

- ❁ Cognitive restructuring: learning to challenge or ‘swap’ negative thoughts for helpful ones
- ❁ Interpersonal skills continued: negotiation skills





SPARX skills in level 6

❁ How to SWAP a GNAT?

❁ SORT IT:

- Negotiate: listen, explain what you need, give a little, take a little, and aim for a compromise



❁ RAPA key:

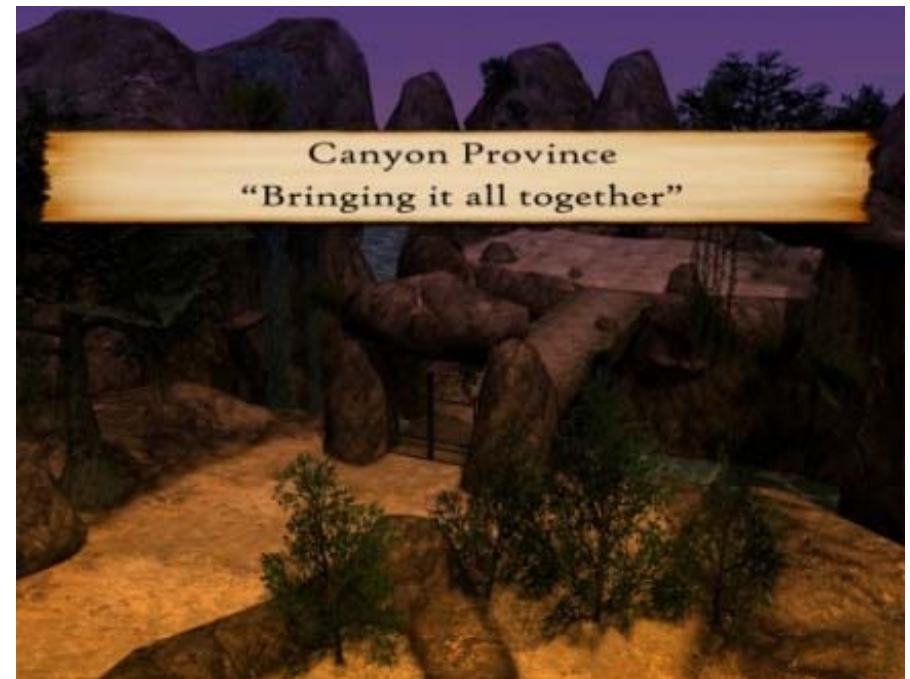
1. **Reality check**
(how do you know your thought is true?)
2. **Another view**
(is there another way to to think about it?)
3. **Perspective**
(is it really as bad as you think?)
4. Think **Action!**
(think solutions, not problems)



Module 7: Canyon Province

“Bringing it all together”

- ❁ Recap of all skills
- ❁ Mindfulness: tolerating distress
- ❁ Relapse prevention: knowing when to ask for help





SPARX skills in level 7

When you feel really bad:

- Try one of your skills, if doesn't work, try another
- Carry on even though you feel down – the worst feeling will pass
- Ask for help

Depression can come back

- practice your skills before you feel really down
- use the Shield as soon as you can
- or get more help



Helpful information on SPARX





SPARX characters



Guide



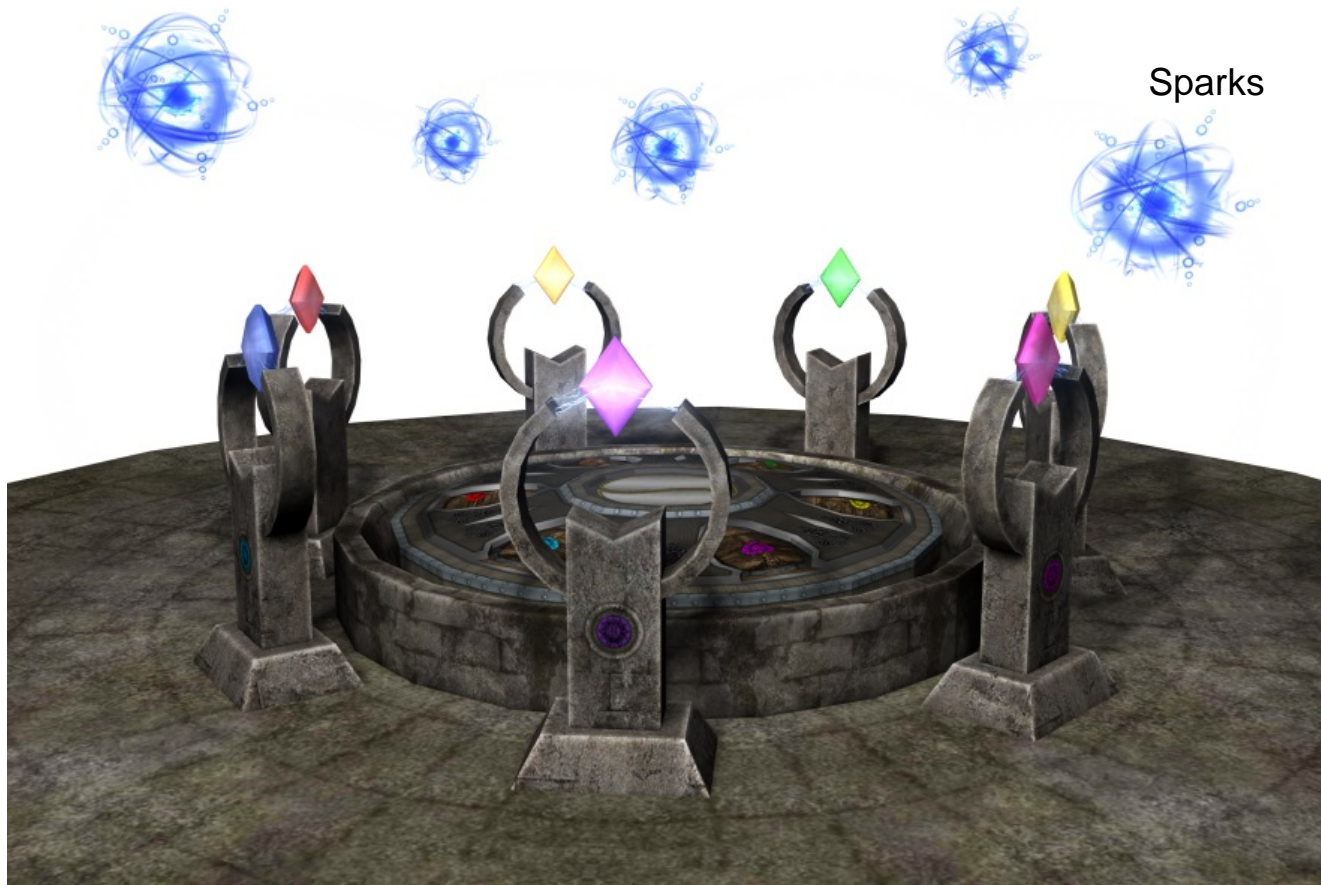
te Hokioi
(with boy holding the Staff of ancestors)



Mentor



SPARKs



Sparks

Smart

Positive

Automatic

Realistic

KeeP these thoughts

Power

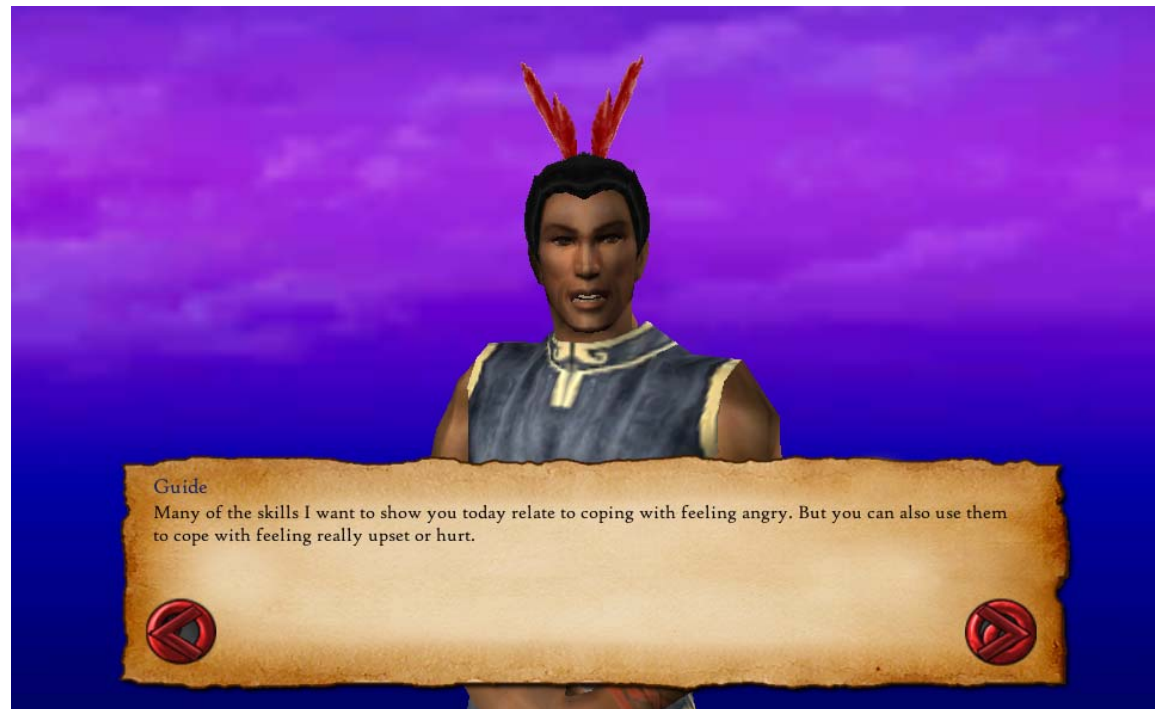
Gem

Circle



SPARX is *not* a game...

- ❁ SPARX *looks* like a game and has elements of gaming but it is *not* designed for pure entertainment
 - It is program that demonstrates clinically useful skills
 - It may be an alternative for some young people
 - It is a valuable tool in a 'therapeutic toolbox'





Try SPARX yourself

- ❁ We suggest you try SPARX for yourself to familiarise yourself with the format and the terms
- ❁ Registration is open to anyone in NZ

