

Welcome to SPARX training for Health 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 (12 to 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



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

Monitoring progress

- SPARX includes a mood monitor (Patient Health Questionnaire-2 modified for Adolescents, PHQ-A) at levels 1, 4 and 7
- The user answers 2 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

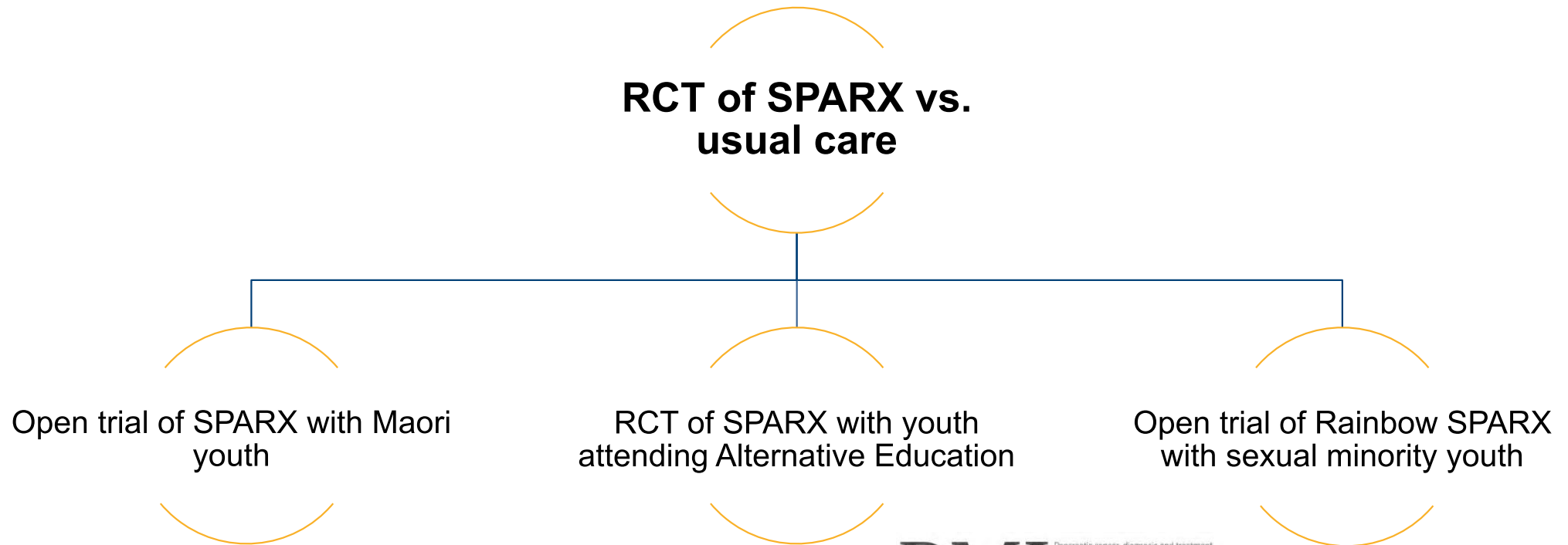
What is e-therapy?

- 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



BMJ Pancreatic cancer: diagnosis and treatment
What do to with an incidental paraprotein
Is flu vaccine safe in pregnancy?
How David Southall's career was wrecked
JOBS, COURSES, AND CAREERS



Can computer games help adolescents with depression?

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

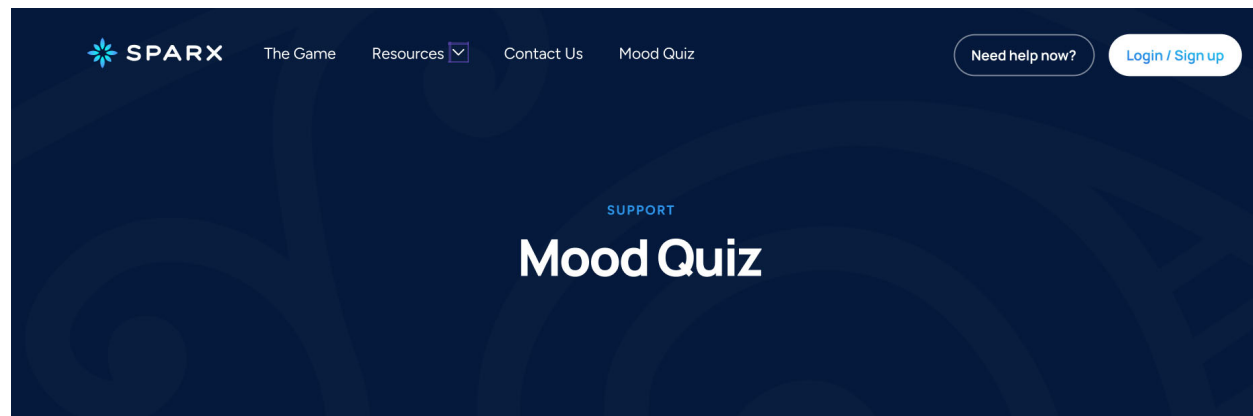
If you are using the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) or its modified version for Adolescents (PHQ-A):

- 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”



Let's check your mood

We all experience bad days and feel low, stressed or worried from time to time. When these feelings go on for a while it may be that you are experiencing depression or anxiety, or both.

The Patient Health Questionnaire - Adolescent (PHQ-A) is one of the tools used to screen for the presence and severity of depression and to monitor response to treatment. Take this self-test to check if you're showing any of the common signs of depression. This test does not replace a health professional and it is not a diagnosis.

Note: your responses to this questionnaire are anonymous. Your scores are not recorded and we do not capture any information that can identify you.

[Start mood quiz](#)

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

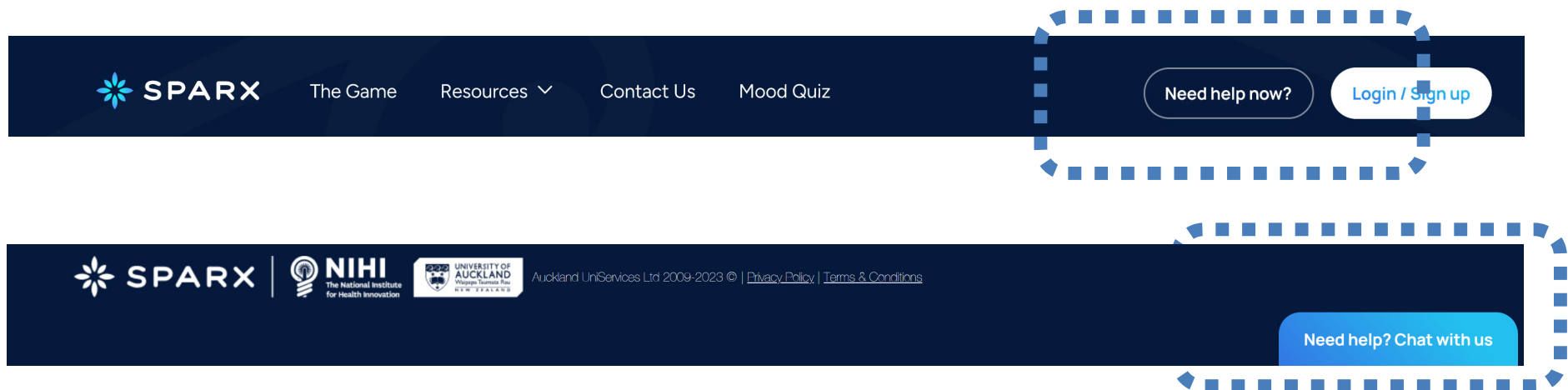


How should SPARX be used to maximise benefits?

- 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?

- 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

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



Module 2: Ice Cave 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. **B**ite your tongue
2. **L**ook at the speaker
3. **B**e Interested
4. **N**o interruptions
5. **C**heck 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

Module 6: The Temple 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 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:

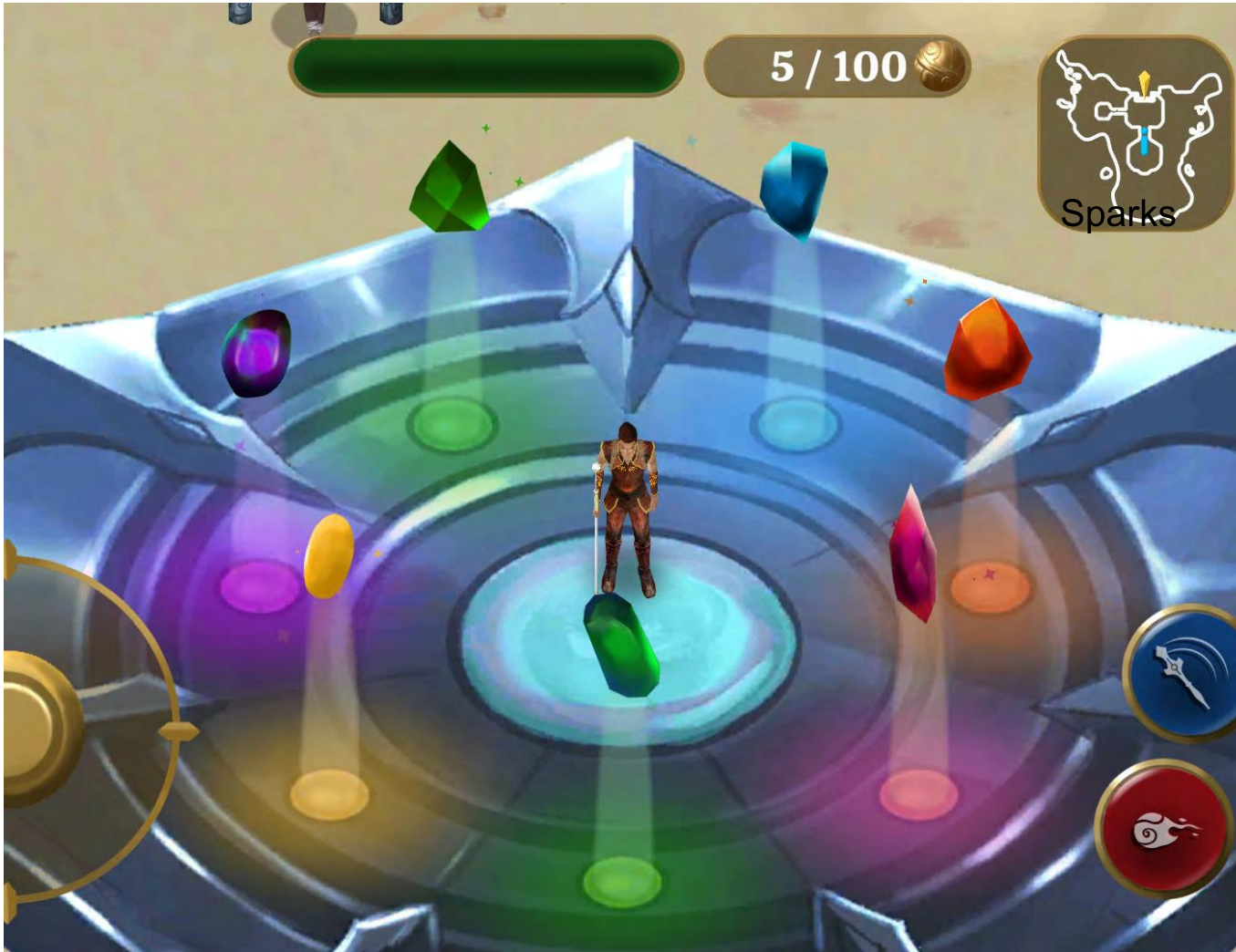
- Try one of your skills, if doesn't work, try another
- Carry on even though you feel down – the worst feeling will pass
- Ask for help

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

SPARKs



Smart

Positive

Automatic

Realistic

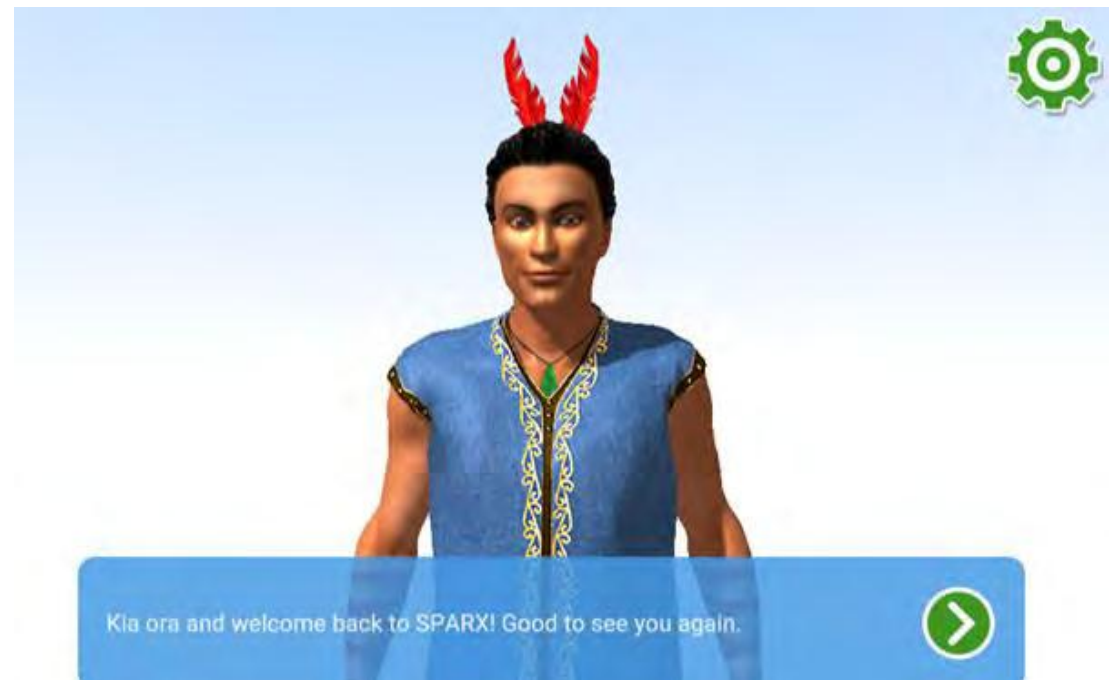
Keep these thoughts

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