



Life Skills in the 4-H Program

Positive Youth Development – the 4-H Way

The foundation of the 4-H Youth Development Program is based on the essential elements of positive youth development. These essential elements tie into the 4-H pledge and the basic life skills that are the base of all 4-H activities. While these learning experiences are “hands on” and deal with topics of current interest and relevance to the young person, they also develop basic, transferable skills useful in other settings. The challenge to you as a leader is to design and encourage youth to participate in experiences that build a variety of skills.

4-H Youth Development creates opportunities for youth:

... To experience INDEPENDENCE

I pledge my head to clearer thinking...

Youth need to feel that they are able to influence others through active decision making. A growing ability to think, feel, make decisions and initiate action represents the sense of responsibility and discipline that comes with increased independence and self-reliance.

... To experience BELONGING

I pledge my heart to greater loyalty...

Youth need a sense of physical and emotional safety. They need to feel connected to others in their group. Research shows that it is important for youth to have opportunities for long-term, consistent relationships with adults other than their parents. A sense of belonging may be the single most powerful factor that promotes positive youth development.

...To experience GENEROSITY

I pledge my hands to larger service...

Youth need to feel their lives have meaning and purpose. By participating in 4-H community service and citizenship activities, youth can connect to communities and learn to give back to others. Youth learn that they do not live in a secluded world, but instead it is indeed a global community, which requires awareness and compassion for others.

...To experience MASTERY

I pledge my health to better living...

In order to develop their self-confidence youth need to feel and believe they are capable. They also need to experience success at solving problems and meeting challenges. By exploring 4-H projects and activities, youth master skills to make positive career and life choices. Youth need to have a safe environment for making mistakes and getting feedback, not just through competition, but also as an ongoing element of participation.



Teaching Life Skills and Promoting the 4-H Essential Elements

Each Essential Element reflects the types of skills that can be developed over one's lifetime, such as thinking, being, managing, relating, caring, giving, and working.

The *Targeting Life Skills Model* identifies four types of life skills represented by the 4-H Clover emblem, Head, Heart, Hands, and Health. Each type, or "H," includes two different categories of skills.

This model can guide you in planning and conducting 4-H learning experiences. By intentionally targeting one or more specific life skills, your club's activities will be more effective in promoting the 4-H Essential Elements.

Begin with a Plan

When planning 4-H learning experiences, you can ask yourself these questions:

- What are the life skills I want youth to learn?
- How can I teach these life skills through experiences with specific subject matter?
- How can I reinforce the use of these life skills in future situations?
- How can I involve youth as resources for subsequent teaching and/or reinforcement of these skills?
- How can I create the context for belonging, self-reliance, generosity, and mastery?

Using these questions as a planning guide, you can create positive experiential activities that help youth master life skills and experience the 4-H Essential Elements now and in their future.

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References

Essential Elements of Youth Development Fact Sheet. http://www.national4-hheadquarters.gov/about/4h_elements.htm.



 *Did You Know...* 

As early as 1902, 4-H began as corn clubs for boys and canning clubs for girls, which taught youth life skills through practical farm techniques and experimentations.

New Jersey 4-H club work began in 1915.

For more information on New Jersey 4-H, please visit www.nj4h.rutgers.edu.

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