



FOUR ESSENTIAL AND EIGHT CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Positive Youth Development builds on young peoples' strengths or assets. It is development that is healthy and productive for both the youth and their families.

Positive youth development occurs from an intentional process that promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, choices, relationships, and the support necessary for youth to fully participate in families and society. Youth development occurs in families, peer groups, schools, neighborhoods and communities (Smith, 2002).

There are four essential elements of positive youth development as presented by Dr. Cathann Kress, Director, Youth Development, National 4-H Headquarters, CSREES, USDA.

- Belonging
- Mastery
- Independence
- Generosity



The four essential elements are based on work conducted in 1999 by a group of evaluators from the National 4-H Impact Design Implementation Team. They identified eight elements that are critical to positive youth development. The eight critical elements help establish the base for the four essential elements.

1. Belonging

- » Positive Relationship with a Caring Adult
- » An Inclusive Environment
- » A Safe Environment

2. Mastery

- » Opportunities for Mastery
- » Engagement in Learning

3. Independence

- » Opportunities to See Oneself as an Active Participant in the Future
- » Opportunities for Self-determination

4. Generosity

- » Opportunities to Value and Practice Service to Others

Gambone, Klem and Connell (2002) report that youth who are exposed to these elements tend to do well in school, establish healthy outside interests, and develop basic life skills. These youth take responsibility and avoid risky behaviors. They are also more likely to be productive adults in their communities.

On the following pages there are a variety of resources on the 8 elements:

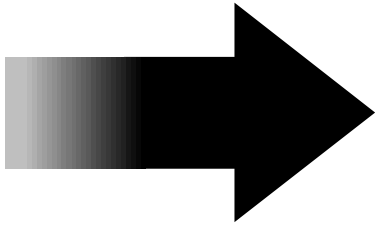
1) An overview sheet summarizing the 4 critical and 8 essential elements designed to duplicate.

2) A fact sheet on each of the 8 essential elements. The fact sheet includes a definition of the element, questions to ask about the practice of this element in your youth group, additional activities your youth group might adopt to focus on this element and a statement on the value of this element for young people.

3) A simple 8 elements assessment for your community group.

More information about the 4 critical elements can be found in Dr. Cathann Kress' power point presentation included in the research framework section of this binder. A program entitled "How Do I Know" which includes an educational presentation about the 8 elements and simple assessments to use with a community group is included in the teaching tools section of this binder.

The Strengthening 4-H Clubs work team has also developed a series of teaching activities related to the 8 elements. Information about these activities is available on the Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development website.



Critical Elements of 4-H

CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF 4-H

In 1999, a team of five evaluators from the National 4-H Impact Design Implementation Team was given the charge of answering the question, ***“What positive outcomes in youth, adults and communities result from the presence of critical elements in a 4-H Youth Development experience?”***

The group reviewed the basic and applied research on characteristics of effective programs for youth development. Emphasis was placed on using existing empirical research on what impacts positive youth development. Another criterion used by the group was relevance to 4-H that could be communicated to colleagues, researchers and volunteers. From this process, eight elements critical to youth development, and central to the 4-H experience, emerged:

1. A positive relationship with a caring adult

A caring adult acts as an advisor, guide and mentor. The adult helps set boundaries and expectations for young people. The adult could be called supporter, friend and advocate.

2. A safe environment – physically and emotionally

Youth should not fear physical or emotional harm while participating in a 4-H experience whether from the learning environment itself, adults, other participants or spectators.

3. Opportunity for mastery

Mastery is the building of knowledge, skills and attitudes and then demonstrating the competent use of this knowledge and skills in the manner of a proficient practitioner. The level of mastery is dependent on the developmental ability of the individual child or youth. The development of mastery is a process over time.

4. Opportunity to value and practice service for others

Finding one’s role in society can begin with service to others. Service is a way for members to gain exposure to the larger community, indeed the world itself.

5. Opportunity for self-determination

Believing that you have impact over life’s events rather than passively submitting to the will of others is self-determination. Youth who exercise influence over their lives develop their potential to become self-directing, autonomous adults.

6. An inclusive environment (encouragement, affirming, belonging)

An inclusive environment creates a sense of belonging, encourages and supports diverse members with positive and specific feedback. Healthy groups celebrate the success of all members – taking pride in the collective efforts of all.

7. Opportunity to see oneself as an active participant in the future

The ability to see oneself in the future allows youth to harness the hope and optimism to shape life choices and to facilitate the transition into participating in the future.

8. Engagement in learning

An engaged youth is one who is mindful of a subject area, building relationships and connections in order to develop understanding. Through self-reflection, youth have the ability to self-correct and learn from experience. The engaged learner has greater self-motivation and capacity to create.



The 4-H Youth Development Environment

4-H is designed to support the positive and successful development of all youth. 4-H leaders are essential partners in creating a positive environment by focusing on the strengths of youth and providing positive ways for youth to meet the four critical elements.

Belonging - Caring Relationships

All youth need a caring, supportive relationship in their lives. You can be that someone by showing interest in, actively listening to, and fostering the gifts of 4-H youth.

Mastery - Constructive Learning Experiences

Youth rely on the joy they receive from interests, hobbies and group participation to balance disappointments in other parts of their lives (Werner and Smith, 1992). 4-H offers opportunities to take on new challenges and learn new skills. Help youth complete the Experiential Learning Process by experiencing, sharing what happened, processing what was important, generalizing the experience to the real world and applying what was learned to another situation.

Independence - Leadership Opportunities

Creating opportunities for youth to develop skills and confidence for leadership and self-discipline is a cornerstone of 4-H. Help young people recognize the connection between independence and responsibility. Independence does mean greater power and influence but it is linked with responsibility for decisions made and actions taken.

Generosity - Service to Communities

The 4-H Pledge focuses on the importance of larger service and recognizing a responsibility for the welfare of others. Help young people focus on developing concern for others and taking action to demonstrate that concern. Service forges bonds between youth and the community, and doing something valued by others raises feelings of self-worth and competence.

Adapted from Kress et al. (n.d.)

References:

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