

Department of Youth Development and 4-H Youth Development Program  
Engagement and Controversy Philosophical Statement  
4/29/04

*The purpose of this document is to acknowledge that as UW-Extension professionals we are engaged in subjects that have the potential for controversy. Our role in working with the public is to provide objective information based on research and best practice information. This document provides the philosophical foundation for our role as educators in the community as we respond to local issues within the field of youth development subject matter.*

The membership of the UW-Extension Department of Youth Development and 4-H Youth Development Program Area consists of faculty and academic staff who profess expertise in the interdisciplinary research and knowledge base of youth development. Youth development includes communications, educational program design, positive youth development, youth program management and volunteerism. The diversified research and knowledge base provides development of educational prevention programs that address the needs of youth from various racial, ethnic, ability and economic groups. Youth-centered educational programs are implemented by 4-H Youth Development faculty and academic staff in direct contact with youth and by adult and youth volunteers trained to work with youth.

As a public education system, our mission is to provide the current research and resources available from the behavioral and physical sciences appropriate to youth development issues. In this capacity, the faculty and academic staff introduce ideas and encourage discussion to support transformational education of the individual and the community. The information presented, and the growth or change that occurs may be viewed by factions of the public as controversial.

The role of the Department of Youth Development is to listen and to ask probing questions so that people clarify their own inquiries and the positions they are taking. In addition, it is important to help point out the known or probable consequences of each strategy proposed to answer a public issue. We implement practices and guidelines that are aimed at insuring the health and safety of youth. We are advocates of Positive Youth Development and we will help the public understand the implications of each potential course of action.

Entering into the political arena means that Extension may be identified as advocating one particular point of view. Therefore, academic freedom must be maintained in order to address controversial issues. It is important to inform all organizations or individuals who are actively engaged in discussion of an issue that Extension has information to provide and is willing to be facilitative of the discussion.

In summary, the role of the Department of Youth Development and 4-H Youth Development Program Area is to:

- Raise important questions that citizens must ponder in order to find satisfactory solutions to youth development issues.
- Provide, in an understandable form, access to University research and resources, which can be brought to bear on the topic.
- Serve as facilitators of life long learning and discussion.
- Implement practices and guidelines that advocate positive youth development and are aimed at insuring the health and safety of youth.

Resources:

UW-Extension Department of Youth Development Handbook  
"Cooperative Extension's role In Public Policy Education", Colorado State University

Submitted by Frank Ginther, Jean Berger, Penny Tank

Examples of Youth Development issues that have potential for controversy include:

#### Leadership and Citizenship Development

- Defining appropriate & inappropriate behavior in a group setting
- Valuing diversity and multicultural education
- Encouraging tolerance and respect for individual differences
- Developing teamwork & cooperation
- Making ethical decisions
- Addressing the pros & cons of competition

#### Youth Issues Education

- Alcohol, Tobacco, and other Drugs
- Sexuality
- Abstinence & Birth Control
- Nutrition and Childhood Obesity
- Juvenile Justice
- Parenting Programs
- Gang Involvement
- Bullying and Hazing

#### Volunteer Development

- Ethical handling of finances
- Sensitive issues as they relate to youth & adult partnerships
- Exercising non-discriminatory practices & teaching tolerance
- Providing positive examples of social behavior when working with youth
- Volunteer screening through the youth protection process

This statement was adopted on an advisory ballot by the Department of Youth Development faculty and academic staff on April 29, 2004.