

# Reviewing Youth Development Principles<sup>1</sup>

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Because 4-H is the youth development arm of Land Grant University outreach, 4-H youth development professionals are responsible for knowing and applying to their programs the most current and valid information regarding support for the growth and development of the youth in their communities.

Many people do not know that non-formal, out-of school youth development work has a professional knowledge base or that the quality of programs offered in these settings depends upon the training of professionals in the field. It

is up to the youth development professional to explain the field to the community and to assure that community members recognize the vital role this profession plays in our society. The goal of youth development programs is to help youth become fully prepared for transition to adulthood. Youth development professionals offer youth opportunities within healthy environments to master the competencies they will need to make this transition.

Youth Development is an ongoing process through which young people attempt to meet their needs and develop the competencies they perceive as necessary for survival and transition to adulthood.

## Support Youth's Basic Needs

In order to master skills, young people must have certain needs met. Research tells us that they must have

- safety and structure
- a sense of belonging and membership
- closeness and several good relationships
- experience with gaining competence and mastering skills
- independence and control over some part of their lives
- self-awareness and the ability and opportunities to act on that understanding
- a sense of self-worth and the ability and opportunities to contribute

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## Develop Supporting Environments for Youth

Because youth grow and develop in the context of the family, community and society, these are the places where these needs must be met. Environments that provide the conditions for the healthy growth and development of youth can be described as those that:

- are inclusive and create connections and sense of belonging including a positive relationship with a caring adult;
- provide opportunities to value and practice service for others;
- provide autonomy including an opportunity for self-determination;
- provide opportunity for mastering skills and engaging in learning;
- assure physical and emotional safety; and
- help youth vision a positive role for themselves in the future.

## Youth Competencies for Transitioning to Adulthood

In addition, 4-H professionals are responsible for the outcomes of working directly with youth to help individual youth achieve the skills they need. For this, they must know the specific competencies to target for individual youth and identify the means by which those skills are learned.

Research has identified five competency areas that youth must master for positive development and preparation for adulthood. These are:

1. **Health/physical competence:** having the appropriate knowledge, attitudes and behaviors that will ensure current and future health
2. **Personal/social competence:** personal skills such as an ability to understand one's emotions and practice self discipline; and interpersonal skills such as working with others and developing and sustaining friendships
3. **Knowledge, reasoning and creativity competence:** a broad base of knowledge, knowledge application skills,

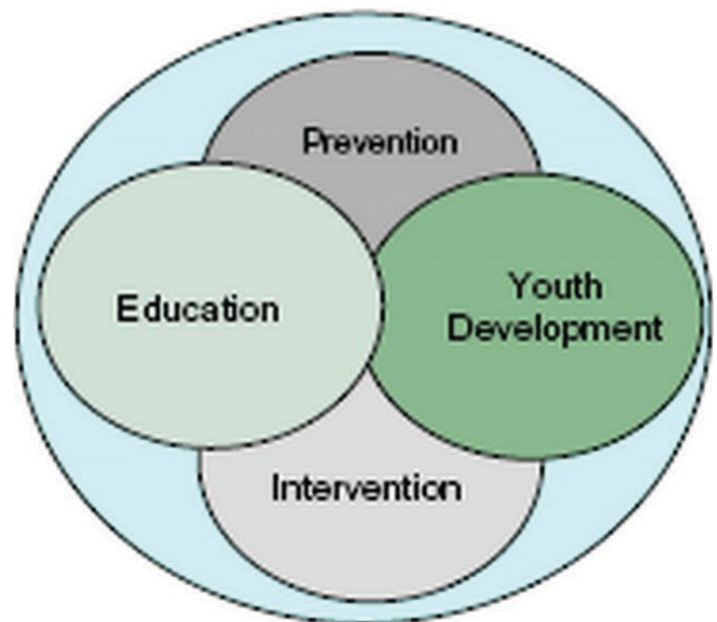
life long learning skills and an ability to appreciate and demonstrate creative expression.

4. **Vocational Competence:** Understanding and awareness of life options and the steps necessary to accomplish them. Adequate preparation for work and family life.
5. **Citizenship competency:** Understanding of the history and values of one's nation, community, race, ethnic and cultural heritage. Desire to be ethical and to be involved in contributing to the broader good.

**The Youth Development Professional** provides environments that meet the needs of youth and to offer opportunities within those environments for youth to master the competencies that prepare them for successful adulthood.

Youth Development professionals must understand and apply these two sets of components to their work. They must assure that the conditions necessary for healthy growth are present in the environments in which youth live, and that opportunities to develop competence are offered in the youth programs within those communities or environments.

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# Understanding the Different Approaches to Youth Development and Applications within 4-H

Youth programs usually take one or more approaches toward development of youth. Typically, programs focus on prevention or intervention or education. Taking a Youth Development approach is the fourth approach that is advocated and supported as the ultimate focus of Extension 4-H programs. Each of these approaches have a different focus, target different audiences levels within the ecological context of development and different goals thus producing different types of outcomes. Since 4-H is a unique youth development program linked to the landgrant universities, it has over the years taken a four-fold approach through varied programs (see Table 1 for examples), as it engages young people in the work of the land-grant university and USDA.

## Youth Development vs. Youth Education in 4-H

In Extension 4-H, programs can be designed for either youth development or youth education. These are often viewed as interlocking links of the mission of Extension 4-H programs. The earliest approach of 4-H was education. 4-H, being the only youth development program with direct access to technological advances resulting from land-grant research, provided youth the opportunities to lead by example. 4-H demonstrated that youth are early adopters and can change a community or influence societal changes. Therefore, youth education continues to be a fundamental 4-H approach.

Youth education tends to focus more simply on the short-term gain of educational content being delivered rather than the broader, more comprehensive nature of youth development. Youth education is often aimed at the mastery of knowledge, skills or competencies representing only one component of the 4-H Essential Elements of youth development.

Over time, 4-H became equally focused on youth development.

The broader, more comprehensive nature of youth development requiring greater knowledge, research and understanding of the principles of youth development became the ultimate goal of 4-H programs.

To focus programming on the youth development approach, 4-H professionals must understand three key elements:

- Youth development considers the *whole* young person, not just a single characteristic or problem.
- Youth development is dependent on family and community development as it *occurs in the context* of the family, community and society.
- Youth development is designed to focus on the *positive outcomes* we desire for young people, not the negative outcomes we hope to prevent.

All youth will find ways to: 1) Meet their basic needs 2) Build skills and values 3) Use their skills, talents, energies and time in ways that make them feel good and powerful with or without the assistance of adults. Youth development is the work of youth. Adults cannot do this work for them. But caring, knowledgeable and skilled adults can contribute to the success of young people as they grow and develop. Adults do this by providing environments for youth that are safe and nurturing and by expanding opportunities for experiences that will help young people develop skills they need for adulthood. 4-H Youth development professionals guide the volunteers and the community in providing these experiences through their 4-H Club Program and other 4-H delivery systems of support.

## Essential Elements of 4-H Youth Programs

### Components of Effective Programs

Programs that are successful in assuring changed behavior in the positive growth and development of the youth they serve:<sup>3</sup>

- Have well prepared and well supported staff who are offered ongoing training, who apply developmentally and culturally appropriate practices, and who know of and use community resources.
- Serve a broad based audience that reaches all youth in the community including those at high risk and reaches them early in their development.
- Offer comprehensive programming that is based upon the principles of youth development and that offers opportunities for youth to master skills in competence, character, and connections.
- Are designed with input from participants and involve and empower youth in their delivery.

- Have clearly defined outcomes that inform staff and participants of the developmental changes that are targeted.
- Collect and use evaluation information to refine the program and have the ability to become self-sustaining over time.

**Positive Youth Development** is development that is positive and productive for both youth and their communities.

It is also important that youth development professionals are prepared to advocate for their work. Parents and community groups need to know how the activities and experiences that are offered through your youth program support the development of youth. Staff and volunteers who work in these programs must be able to explain how a given activity or series of experiences enhance the development of the young people who participate in them. Community support occurs when the importance of a youth program to the health of the community is recognized.

## Essential Elements of 4-H

The overall goals of the 4-H Youth Development Program can be illustrated and defined through the four Essential Elements representing the four H's—head, heart, hands and health and the basic needs and competencies of youth. It is based on research finding of these four types of needs (Kress, 2003).

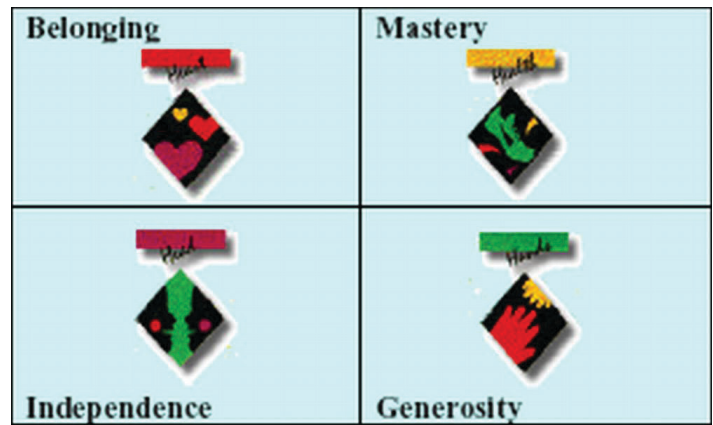
### 4-H creates opportunities for young people to:

- build skills,
- exercise leadership,
- form relationships

**with caring adults and help their communities.**

All Youth need:

- To know they are cared about by others (Attachment, Belonging, Connection)
- To feel and believe they are capable and successful (Achievement, Mastery, Competence)
- To know they are able to influence people and events (Autonomy, Power, Confidence)
- To practice helping others through their own generosity (Altruism, Purpose, Contribution)



I pledge my head to clearer thinking... *To develop responsibility, youth need to know that they are able to influence people and events through decision-making and action.*

I pledge my heart to greater loyalty... *Current research emphasizes the importance for youth to have opportunities for long-term consistent relationships with adults other than parents. This research suggests that a sense of belonging may be the single most powerful positive ingredient we can add into the lives of children and youth.*

I pledge my health to better living... *To develop self-confidence youth need to feel and believe they are capable and they must experience success at solving problems and meeting challenges.*

I pledge my hands to larger service... *By participating in community service, youth connect to communities and learn to give back. These experiences help youth understand the "big picture" of life and find purpose and meaning*

## What makes an effective 4-H youth development program?

- Youth as resources
- Ecological Approach
- Caring adults and safe environments
- Belonging with rules
- Flexible and responsive
- Long-term
- Real work and real responsibility
- Experiences resulting in product or presentation

## What does it take to assist young people to become healthy, problem-solving, constructive adults?

Youth must:

- Find a valued place in a constructive group
- Learn how to form close, durable human relationships
- Earn a sense of worth as a person
- Achieve a reliable basis for making informed choices
- Express constructive curiosity and exploratory behavior
- Find ways of being useful to others
- Believe in a promising future with real opportunities
- Cultivate the inquiring and problem-solving habits of the mind
- Learn to respect democratic values and responsible citizenship
- Build a healthy lifestyle

**4-H believes** “youth development” is not something you do TO youth, but is the result of programming WITH youth and is dependent upon the family and other adults in the community.

## IF YOU WERE TO DESIGN A YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM INTENDED TO ASSIST YOUNG PEOPLE TO BECOME HEALTHY, PROBLEM-SOLVING CONSTRUCTIVE ADULTS – WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE?

- It would offer opportunities for youth to experience *belonging*.
- It would offer opportunities for youth to experience a “hands-on” laboratory.
- It would offer opportunities for young people to *choose*.
- It would offer opportunities to experience what it means to be a *citizen*.

It might look a lot like a 4-H Club.

Table 1. Examples of Different Program Approaches to Youth Development Through Extension 4-H

4-H APPROACH:	Education	Prevention	Intervention	Youth Development
<b>FOCUS:</b>	Competencies	Risks and Risk Factors	Risks and Risk Factors	Youth Development
<b>TARGET:</b>	Individual Learners	Social Norms and Communities	Specific Audience “at risk”	Environmental Conditions Experiences and Opportunities- the contexts for youth
<b>GOAL:</b>	Bringing about Change (knowledge, skills, practices and behaviors)	Eliminating or Reducing Problems	Risks and Risk Factors	Development of Potential, Maturity
<b>OUTCOMES:</b>	Life Skills	Fewer Problems	Skills or Behaviors to cope with specific risk or problem-free.	Maturity & Individual Potential
<b>EXAMPLES:</b>	Financial Literacy	Health Rocks	Teen Pregnancy	4-H Clubs for youth
	Leadership		Health and Fitness	