



The Essential Elements of 4-H Youth Development

The National 4-H Curriculum Collection is designed to engage youth in learning opportunities that promote positive youth development. In 4-H, the critical components of a successful learning experience are a sense of Belonging, Independence, Mastery, and Generosity. Across each curriculum, the 4-H Essential Elements (Belonging, Independence, Mastery, and Generosity) are embedded through the learning experience. In each facilitator's guide, opportunities are provided to put the Essential Elements into practice. It is your role, as the facilitator, to foster growth of the Essential Elements through the learning experience.

Belonging

Youth need to know they are cared about by others and feel a sense of connection to others in the group. As the facilitator, it is important to provide youth the opportunity to feel physically and emotionally safe while actively participating in a group. Create a safe and inclusive environment and foster a positive relationship with youth learners. Use discussion questions that encourage youth to learn from each other, synthesize and use ideas collaboratively.

Independence

Youth need to know that they are able to influence people and events through decision-making and action. They learn to better understand themselves and become independent thinkers. Throughout each curriculum, youth are given opportunities to develop and reflect upon thoughts and responses to the challenges, explorations, and investigations. Youth begin to understand that they are able to act as change agents with confidence and competence as a result of their learning.

Mastery

In order to develop self-confidence youth need to feel and believe they are capable and they must experience success at solving problems and meeting challenges. Youth need a breadth and depth of topics that allow them to pursue their own interests. Introduce youth to expert knowledge and guide them toward their own sense of mastery and accomplishment.

Generosity

Youth need to feel their lives have meaning and purpose. Throughout each curriculum, youth are encouraged to broaden their perspectives, find relevance in the topic area and bring ideas back to their community.

Adapted from 4-H Essential Elements of 4-H Youth Development, Dr. Cathann Kress, 2004.