

The Essential Elements of 4-H Youth Development: Distillation to Four Elements

<p><i>BELONGING</i></p> <p>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.</p> <p>2. An inclusive environment (affirming, belonging) An inclusive environment is one that creates a sense of belonging, encourages and supports its members with positive and specific feedback. Healthy groups celebrate the success of all members – taking pride in the collective efforts of all.</p> <p>3. 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.</p>	<p><i>MASTERY</i></p> <p>4. Engagement in Learning An engaged youth is one who is mindful of the 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 a higher degree of self-motivation and an inexhaustible capacity to create.</p> <p>5. 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.</p>
<p><i>INDEPENDENCE</i></p> <p>6. Opportunity to see oneself as an active participant in the future The ability to see oneself in the future is to harness the hope and optimism to shape life choices to facilitate the transition into participating in the future.</p> <p>7. Opportunity for Self-Determination Believing that you have impact over life's events rather than passively submitting to the will and whims of others is self-determination. Youth must exercise a sense of influence over their lives, exercising their potential to become self-directing, autonomous adults.</p>	<p><i>GENEROSITY</i></p> <p>8. Opportunity to value and practice service for others Finding one's self begins with losing yourself in the service of others. Service is a way for members to gain exposure to the larger community, indeed the world itself.</p>

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In 1999, a team of 5 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 experience?" The eight critical elements identified by that group are distilled here into our current four Essential Elements.

