



## Positive Youth Development

### Understanding Ages & Stages of Youth Development

VRKC: Volunteer Research Knowledge Competency Taxonomy

#### **Intended Audience:**

4-H volunteers

#### **Learning Outcomes:**

- Volunteers will describe the developmental stages of youth.
- Volunteers can describe why understanding developmental stages of youth is important in their 4-H role.
- Volunteers will describe teaching tips that will better meet the developmental stages of youth.

#### **Time:**

20 – 30 minutes

#### **Supplies Needed:**

- Pencils and paper
- Markers and flip chart paper
- Power Point, Computer and LCD Projector
- Handouts and Evaluations

#### **Do Ahead:**

Prepare handouts.

#### **Author:**

*Sue Pleskac, Professor, Volunteer Leadership Specialist, University of Wisconsin-Extension*

#### **Editor:**

*Sue Pleskac, Professor, Volunteer Leadership Specialist, University of Wisconsin-Extension*

#### **Volunteerism for the Next Generation:**

<http://nextgeneration.4-h.org/volunteerism/>

#### **4-H National Headquarters:**

<http://www.national4-h-headquarters.gov/>

### **INTRODUCTION**

Every child is unique and special. As they grow, youth go through common stages of physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. Developmental stages are universal predictable sequences of growth and change in young people. Each young person will differ in the rate at which they progress. As 4-H volunteers, understanding the developmental stages of youth will allow you to select appropriate teaching methods that are best suited to provide a quality learning environment. It also helps you provide the greatest support in youth-adult partnerships and in mentoring relationships. (Power Point Slides 1, 2)

### **WHAT TO DO**

Each developmental stage is distinct, characterized by abilities and attitudes that build on the preceding stage. The stages tend to follow four age groupings: (Power Point Slide 3)

- Early Childhood: Ages 5-8; Grades K-2
- Middle Childhood: Ages 9-11; Grades 3-5
- Early Adolescence: Ages 12-14; Grades 6-8
- Middle Adolescence: Ages 15-18; Grades 9-12

#### Activity 1: How Do Youth Develop?

Distribute Handout 1. Have participants match the characteristics with the developmental stage. As they complete the activity, distribute Handout 2. Have participants correct their answers. Ask participants to share examples of the developmental stages from their 4-H volunteer work with youth. What changes will you make based on your understanding of developmental stages?

There are two basic principles to consider with developmental stages of youth. (Power Point Slide 4)

1. Age is not a perfect predictor of maturity. Most youth will go through stages in a predictable order, but the age they do this can vary greatly between youth. Providing choices of activities or multiple levels of difficulty with an activity will help meet individual needs.
2. Growth may proceed at different rates in various developmental areas within an individual young person. One youth who excels physically may still be average in emotional or social growth. To reach their full potential, a young person needs to have a variety of experiences.



**VRKC: Volunteer Research Knowledge Competency Taxonomy for 4-H Youth Development:**

<http://www.national4-h.org/headquarters.gov/comm/vrkc.pdf>

**VRKC Research and Design Team:**

*Ken Culp III, Ph.D., University of Kentucky*

*Renee K. McKee, Ph.D., Purdue University*

*Patrick Nestor, Ed.D., West Virginia University*

**References for this lesson:**

- *How Kids Develop.* (2006)  
[www.extension.iastate.edu/4h/Documents/VI950902FAgesStages.PDF](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/4h/Documents/VI950902FAgesStages.PDF)
- 4-H Overnight Chaperone Training. University of Illinois.  
<http://web.extension.illinois.edu/4hchaperone/>

**Activity 2: What Stage Am I At?**

Ask participants to break into groups of three or four people. Distribute Handout 3. Assign one situation for each small group. Have each group discuss the situation, decide on what developmental stage the young person is at, and provide suggestions for enhancing the learning environment for the youth. When completed, have each group share their story and suggestions they have to meet the developmental stage for the youth.

**Conclusion:**

Young people grow and develop at their own pace. You may not observe all characteristics of all youth at the same age or at the same time. Understanding the developmental stages of youth equips 4-H volunteers with the knowledge and tools to provide the best learning environments for youth. (Power Point Slides 5, 6)

**TALK IT OVER**

Reflect:

- Why is it important to understand the developmental stages of youth?
- What things do you do when working with 4-H youth that demonstrate that youth developmental needs are being met?

Apply:

- What changes need to be made in 4-H projects, activities, and events that you work with in your volunteer role to better meet the developmental needs of youth?

**EVALUATION**

Ask each participant to complete the evaluation tool (Handout 4).

**ENHANCE or SIMPLIFY**

Know Your Audience, project leader lesson plan from University of Wisconsin-Extension 4-H Community Club Central, provides additional ideas and activities on understanding developmental stages of youth.  
<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/4h/pubs/showdoc.cfm?documentid=20103>

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## Handout 1

**Matching the Developmental Stages of Youth**

Match the characteristic on the left with the developmental stage on the right by drawing lines.

Strong desire for status in peer group

Choices are often unrealistic

Are easily motivated

Enjoy cooperation and competition

Gain skills in social relations with peers and adults

Can take responsibility in planning and evaluating own work

Need freedom from parental control in making decisions

Can be quite self-conscious

Differentiation between fantasy and reality can be difficult

Attention span is about 20-30 minutes

Can plan own social and recreational activities

High interest in social activity

Attention span is about 45 minutes

Abstract thinking and problem solving reach a higher level

Learn best when physically active

Special attachment to older youth

Competitive activities are less appropriate

Personal philosophy begins to emerge

Acceptance by peer group is important

**Early Childhood:**  
**Ages 5-8; Grades K-2**

**Middle Childhood:**  
**Ages 9-11; Grades 3-5**

**Early Adolescence:**  
**Ages 12-14; Grades 6-8**

**Middle Adolescence:**  
**Ages 15-18; Grades 9-12**



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## Developmental Stages of Youth

<b>Early Childhood: Ages 5-8; Grades K-2</b>	
<b><i>Characteristic</i></b>	<b><i>Teaching Tips</i></b>
Thinking is in the here and now (concrete thinkers)	Youth need real experiences to learn
Attention span is about 20-30 minutes	Vary the length of activities based on how interested the youth appear
Begin to develop friendships, usually with youth of the same sex	Plan activities that youth can do in groups rather than individually
Want to be liked and to please adults	Let youth know when they have done a nice job
Learn best when physically active	Allow youth to participate in activities where they can use physical energy
Have a special attachment to older youth	Allow youth to choose an older youth to be their helper and role model
Are easily motivated	Use encouragement to keep them motivated
Competitive activities are less appropriate	Plan some cooperative activities
Differentiation between fantasy and reality can be difficult	Build in transitions and discussions to help distinguish the imaginary from the real

<b>Middle Childhood: Ages 9-11; Grades 3-5</b>	
<b><i>Characteristic</i></b>	<b><i>Teaching Tips</i></b>
Learn best when physically active	Allow youth to participate in activities where they can use physical energy
Have a special attachment to older youth	Allow youth to choose an older youth to be their helper and role model
Are easily motivated	Use encouragement to keep them motivated
Reading becomes an individual experience	Allow time for youth to read on their own and think of activities before working with others
Attention span is about 45 minutes	Use varied activities to keep them interested
Acceptance by peer group is important	Use the peer group to recognize good works (applauding completed activities and avoiding put-downs)
Interests expand from home to neighborhood to community	Talk to youth about friends and neighbors and what happens in communities. Do community service
Enjoy both cooperation and competition	Plan activities so that sometimes youth work together and sometimes compete with each other
Show independence by seeking individual attention and sometimes disrupting the group	Involve youth in selecting activities they would like. Give individual attention
Feelings of competence enhance self-concept	Provide activities that will let youth feel good about themselves and succeed. Recognize them for their accomplishments
Show loyalty to members of their own sex and antagonism toward those of the opposite sex	Involve youth in choosing partners



<b>Early Adolescence: Ages 12-14; Grades 6-8</b>	
<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Teaching Tips</b>
Can take responsibility in planning and evaluating own work	Give youth responsibility for group activities, including planning, implementing and evaluating
Can plan own social and recreational activity	Provide opportunities for youth to work together. Form committees to plan recreational and social activities
Can discuss current events, international affairs and social issues with some help	Use discussion activities and games that encourage awareness of current events and issues
Want to make decisions but still depend on adult guidelines	Establish guidelines that give parameters for youth to follow
Gain skills in social relations with peers and adults	Provide activities that foster social interaction with peers and adults
Peer pressure mounts, first from same sex, then from opposite sex	Use peer pressure to influence positive behavior. Have group give encouragement to individuals
Can be quite self-conscious	Avoid asking youth to share their work individually until they feel more comfortable with the group
Strong emotional attachment to older youth and adults	Encourage youth to participate in activities with older youth and adults
Choices are often unrealistic	Assist youth in making realistic choices. Review their plans, discuss alternatives and help them weigh options before making decisions

<b>Middle Adolescence: Ages 15-18; Grades 9-12</b>	
<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Characteristic</b>
Personal philosophy begins to emerge	Use activities where youth search for experiences that will allow them to identify their own philosophies
Enjoy discussing the world situations as well as personal activities	Encourage discussion of events and feelings
Abstract thinking and problem solving reach a higher level	Put youth into real-life, problem-solving situations
Strong desire for status in peer groups	Develop a climate in which youth are encouraged and supported by peers
High interest in social activity	Encourage youth to plan and carry out own social activities
Need freedom from parental control to make decisions	Help youth realize their decisions have consequences
Widespread feelings of inferiority and inadequacy	Encourage and help youth see their positive worth

Source: *Theater Arts Adventures, 4-H Cooperative Curriculum System, 1997.*



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## Handout 3

**What Stage Am I?****John:**

John lives in Clovertown. He lives with his mother, grandfather, younger brother, and family cat. John loves to play games with his friends, Jim and Doug. He also likes being with his family camping, biking, and watching television. John asks a lot of questions and is interested in knowing how things happen and why. What developmental stage is John at?

**Dustin:**

Dustin loves building things. As summer vacation approaches, he is planning to help out at the local community center where they are rebuilding the playground area and remodeling the recreation room. Woodworking is his favorite 4-H project. Dustin will mow lawns this summer for senior citizens for extra spending money. He loves trying new things and plans to take golf lessons this summer. He also plans to volunteer time in coaching little league. Dustin is competing for several 4-H leadership award trips, based on his project work, volunteer service, and leadership in the community and club. What development stage is Dustin at?

**Mara:**

Mara is very excited about being in 4-H. All of her friends are in the club. She loves the recreation time at each meeting and they all plan to go to summer camp. Mara is planning on learning how to do cross stitch and work on her insect collection for 4-H projects. What developmental stage is Mara at?

**Theresa:**

Theresa has just moved to Clovertown. Her dad has taken a new job and her mom is looking for a new job to help with family bills. Theresa's parents still send money back to Puerto Rico to support her grandmother. Theresa is trying hard to make new friends and wants to go to 4-H Summer Camp. She knows it will be important to help her feel accepted by other kids. She knows she can get ready for camp on her own. Her parents are not sure she should or can go. Theresa really wants to go and has asked some of her new friends to help her convince her parents that they should let her attend. What developmental stage is Theresa at?



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## Handout 4

## Evaluation

Please complete the following evaluation. The results of the evaluation will be shared with those who work with the program. Your participation in this evaluation is voluntary. Your responses will be combined with the responses of all other participants and you will not be individually identified on any report prepared.

Please answer the questions by circling the number that indicates your level of understanding of the topics listed before and after the training.

1 = Very little understanding

2 = Understand somewhat

3 = Clear understanding

	NOW – After the training			THEN – Before the training		
1. I can describe the developmental stages of youth.	1	2	3	1	2	3
2. I can describe why understanding developmental stages of youth is important in my 4-H role.	1	2	3	1	2	3
3. I can identify teaching tips that will help me better meet the developmental stages of youth.	1	2	3	1	2	3

- Please list at least two ideas or skills that you learned as a result of this presentation.
- How will you use what you learned in this presentation?



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