



4-H ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

PYD: Belonging

All young people want to belong and be members of groups. Groups may be formal like classrooms and school sports teams or informal like 4-H clubs and groups at libraries and youth centers. There are three essential elements that, when present in 4-H clubs, create a strong feeling of belonging among club members.

Essential Element: A Positive Relationship with a Caring Adult

This is without a doubt one of the most important elements in 4-H clubs. Young people in clubs are directly impacted by relationships with caring adults, and if the adult is outside the family, better social development and improved parental relationships occur. Young people in the club learn about different parenting styles and adult views from adults who are not their parents.

Continued positive contact with those caring adults as the club functions together over time creates a mentoring and supportive relationship that nurtures the young person as they grow and develop. The adult helps set boundaries and expectations while acting as a coach and advocate for their club members.

Youth in clubs feel respected and more comfortably interact with club members about their needs and interests when a positive relationship with a caring adult exists in the club. Adults routinely include them in decision-making processes. They are allowed to run meetings and make decisions in ways that are appropriate for their age and development (adapted from Ferrari, 2003). A sense of ownership about what the club does together is developed.

When adults convey a sense of truly caring about youth in clubs, young people feel stronger to try new things, tackle more difficult tasks, and set higher goals for themselves and for their club. Adults in the club provide guidance to youth members through coaching, feedback, and discussion.



Essential Element: An Inclusive Environment

A welcoming and inclusive environment allows young people to feel they are connected and valued in a larger social network. When youth feel they are accepted in a club, they are more likely to contribute to the club and to engage

in healthy peer relationships that benefit their community too. They feel acknowledged for who they are as people and feel safe to participate in the club in a consistent manner true to themselves.

An inclusive environment encourages and supports its members with positive and specific feedback. When feedback is given on a regular basis and not just at the end of a project, club members more easily develop and practice skills because they feel safer to experiment and try new things.

Some ways adults can help 4-H members feel accepted, connected and included in the club are:

- Use buttons, t-shirts, hats, membership cards, or other symbols to signify club membership (adapted from Ferrari, 2003).
- Involve everyone through ice-breakers and other get acquainted activities.
- Sponsor a game with club members where there are no losers.
- Help club members take the lead on sharing with other members their culture through food, dance, art, music, clothing, and crafts.
- Share with club members about your own culture and about cultures represented in your place of employment or among your friends.
- Take your club to a cultural festival in your community.
- Provide many forms of recognition and not just to those club members who excel in competition with other youth.

Essential Element: A Safe Emotional and Physical Environment

Young people need to feel safe at all times—physically as well as psychologically safe. This is the most basic need for healthy youth development. Youth participating in clubs should not fear physical or emotional harm whether from the club's learning environment itself or from adults, other club members, or spectators. They then can feel free and comfortable to act honestly and communicate openly in the club.

Programs involving club members need to be free from physical danger and adequately equipped for the activities taking place. That's why lifeguards are needed at camp waterfronts, programs have sign-in and sign-out procedures, medical releases and adult background checks are utilized, and why safety precautions are important to help club members get to and home safely from club activities and functions.

Program environments also need to be emotionally safe where club members are not afraid they will be made fun of, insulted, or threatened (adapted from Ferrari, 2003). Emotional dangers, though, are often harder to identify, more damaging, and longer lasting than physical ones.

Simple steps adults can take to ensure emotional and physical safety in a club include:

- Prior to any program, consider the possible risks involved and eliminate or manage those risks.
- Talk to club members about electrical, fire, water, first aid, and even food safety.
- Help club members learn about safety aspects of their 4-H projects.
- Do not tolerate bullying, cliques, or put-downs.
- Be consistent in how you deal with misbehavior.
- Make sure all adults assisting with the club are trained in safety and child protection.
- Talk to club members about ways to improve the club environment.



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