

4-H ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

PYD: MASTERY

The fourth Key Concept of Positive Youth Development is Mastery. Mastery is described as building knowledge, skills, and attitudes and then providing opportunities for youth to demonstrate the competent use of the new knowledge and skills. Mastery is associated with the “Hands” in the 4-H pledge because of the experiential or hands-on learning component of the 4-H program.

In 4-H, we develop Mastery through the projects and activities that youth complete over time. Mastery is a process that changes with the developmental level of each youth. As youth complete their projects, they master skills that lead to future career and life choices.

Essential Element: Opportunity for Mastery

Mastery is related to “self-efficacy”. Self-efficacy is believing in yourself and knowing you are capable of achieving goals and mastering tasks. Youth need to feel and believe they are capable. Experiencing success at solving problems and meeting challenges develops their self confidence. Settings that promote mastery and self-efficacy encourage youth to take risks, seek out challenges and focus on self-improvement rather than comparing themselves to their peers.

The degree of mastery a youth strives for depends on their developmental level. Knowledge of developmental milestones (physical, cognitive, emotional and social) can help adults meet the needs of each youth in their projects and activities.

For more information on the stages of youth development, see the *Developmentally Speaking* handout from the Letters to New Leaders series: <http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/state4h/launcher.cfm?ID=6221> or the *Helping You Help Youth Fact Sheet: Working with Boys and Girls* (available Winter 2011).



4-H volunteers might consider the following regarding mastery in their club:

- Does the club set goals and work to achieve them?
- Do members have opportunities to practice and demonstrate their knowledge and skills for others?
- Do older members mentor and assist others in the same interest area or skill?
- Are the projects and activities of the club appropriate for the abilities of the group members?
- Do members set project goals and work to achieve them?

Ways that volunteers might enhance the opportunities for mastery in their 4-H clubs include:

Set club goals to achieve. As you meet with your club officers to plan activities for the year, encourage them to set club goals. Make sure your goals are realistic, yet challenging and include all club members in their completion.

Encourage club members to set project goals. 4-H has project goal-setting forms created based on the developmental stages of youth. Consider taking time at each club meeting to set goals for members' projects and update completion of the goals. Goal setting forms can be found at http://web.extension.illinois.edu/state4h/members/recognition_forms.cfm

Provide opportunities for youth to demonstrate their knowledge and skills to others. This can be accomplished through providing time for talks and demonstrations during club meetings or a club exhibit night for members to exhibit projects or activities they have completed for family and friends.

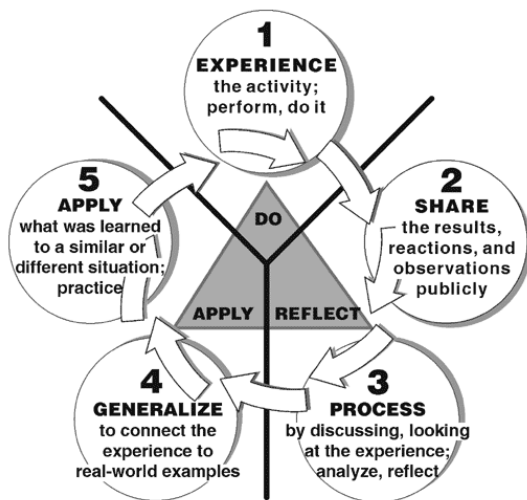
Provide opportunities for public recognition. Schedule a club recognition potluck or a family night. Encourage members to share their accomplishments with each other, their family, friends and community.

**Essential Element:
Engagement in Learning**

Active learning strategies keep youth engaged and interested in what is being taught. Engaged youth are mindful of the subject area while building relationships and connections to develop understanding. Engagement is about the spark of excitement learning can create. Simply having a learning experience is not enough. Knowledge comes with the transformation of the experience. Youth who are involved in the learning process and given opportunities to successfully meet challenges and solve problems are more likely to develop self-confidence and feel they are capable of succeeding.

In 4-H, we practice active learning strategies by implementing the Experiential Learning Model. This model allows youth to learn by being active participants in the experience. After the experience, adult facilitators provide opportunities for discussion and reflection that help youth understand how to apply what they learned to everyday situations in their own lives. For more information on Experiential Learning see the *Helping You Help Youth Fact Sheet: Projects and Activities* available at: <http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/state4h/launcher.cfm?ID=3578>

Experiential Learning Process



To foster experiential learning, 4-H volunteers might consider the following questions:



- Do activities and experiences encourage curiosity, questioning and exploration?
- Are club activities based on the “hands on” approach to learning?
- Do club activities provide experiences that make a difference to others or relate to real life situations?

Some practices volunteers can use to enhance experiential learning in a 4-H club include:

Involve members in planning and organizing club activities. Encourage your club officers to take the lead in organizing activities. Use committees to plan events and activities so more youth are involved in the decision process. As volunteers, serve as facilitators to support the youth.

Encourage club members to become leaders in your club. There are many different ways to demonstrate leadership besides being the club President. Each club officer is engaged in a leadership learning experience, as is each member of a club committee. Encourage younger members who are not ready to be club officers to help make decisions on committees or as part of club activities to prepare them for future roles.

Allow time for youth to reflect on their successes and failures. When youth are in leadership roles, things do not always work out as you, the volunteer, may plan. It is important to allow the learning experience to happen and then to discuss the situation with the club members. The best learning experiences are not always the most perfect!

Author: Amy Leman, Unit Educator, 4-H Youth Development
University of Illinois Extension, Macon Unit
February 2010

