

Defining the 4-H Positive Youth Development Experience

4-H serves as a model program for the practice of positive youth development by creating positive **learning** experiences; positive **relationships** for and between youth and adults; positive, safe **environments**; and opportunities for positive **risk taking**.¹

4-H positive learning experiences are an active process where young people gain understanding, skills, dispositions, identities, and new habits of mind through hands-on experiences. 4-H positive learning experiences are reflective and intentional. 4-H learning is also progressive, with experiences building on each other over time. 4-H learning is social and connected to a larger, real-world context. It is a multi-dimensional experience that integrates transformative relationships, learning environments, learning pathways, and learning outcomes.²



The **positive relationships** between youth and adults is a key component of the 4-H positive youth development experience. These relationships are built on a foundation of mutual respect and caring. 4-H programs provide opportunities for adaptive developmental relationships, where youth interact with their contexts in ways that are mutually beneficial and empowering. Developmental relationships help youth feel expressions of caring, expand possibilities, share power, provide support, and challenge growth.³

4-H program creates **positive, safe environments** through its organizational practices. The organizational practices are a combination of program quality standards, such as inclusion, safety and standards; program values, such as collaboration, culturally competent, flexible and youth as resources; and youth program principles, such as youth engagement, low/staff/volunteer to youth ratio. These practices describe the intentional strategies upon which a high quality youth program is built that has safe, reliable and accessible activities and spaces.⁴



Positive risk taking challenges growth and teaches youth how to push themselves to keep getting better, learning from mistakes and setbacks, and striving to live up to their potential. The 4-H program recognizes that challenges and experiences that stretch youth can be used as a strategy to help youth develop positive outcomes. Instead of avoiding difficult situations, positive challenge and growth can be a tool in addressing the ever-changing future.⁵

¹ Fact Sheet: *The Science of Positive Youth Development*. (March 2016) <https://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resources/Science%20of%20Positive%20Youth%20Development.pdf>

² *The 4-H Learning Experience: A Framework for Learning and Teaching in 4-H*. (2016) <https://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/asset/document/The%204-H%20Learning%20Experience.pdf>

³ *The Developmental Relationships Framework*. (July 2016). Search Institute. <http://www.search-institute.org/downloadable/Developmental-Relationships-Framework.pdf>

⁴ University of California 4-H Youth Development Program Framework as described in Arnold, M.E., Silliman, B., Bledsoe, L., Diaz, L., Johnson, J., Lauxman, L., Miner, G., & White, D.J. (2016). *4-H Program Quality and Accountability Task Force: PYD Frameworks committee final report*.

⁵ Fact Sheet: *The Science of Positive Youth Development*. (March 2016) <https://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resources/Science%20of%20Positive%20Youth%20Development.pdf>