

**Does your 4-H Club foster Belonging?**



## Positive Relationship with a Caring Adult

The underlying premise for this element is that youth will develop caring and trusting relationships. These relationships need to begin in infancy with parents and caregivers and continue into adolescence with teachers, youth group leaders, and adults in the community. A caring adult, whether a supporter, friend, advisor, or neighbor acts as a mentor and guide. Groups with a caring relationship demonstrate warmth, connectedness, good communication, support and guidance for youth.

### In our youth group.....

- Are volunteers sensitive to members' diversity?
- Do adult leaders work competently with small groups?
- Do leaders actively participate in a variety of group activities with youth?
- Do youth and adults participate equally in planning, implementing and evaluating group activities?
- Is time provided for youth and adults to meet and learn about each other?
- Are opportunities provided for youth to continue friendships with other youth and adults?
- Are adults willing to share experiences, views, values and feelings?

### Some practices your group might want to implement to help develop caring relationships:

- Use nametags so youth can get to know each other on a first name basis and so they can get to know the names of the adults as well.
- Adults and youth listen and concentrate when anyone talks.
- Encourage youth and adults to learn and participate as teams—rotate the team membership with various projects.
- Adults and youth interact and sit together at meetings.
- Celebrate and have fun together in addition to taking care of business.
- Take the time to learn about each youth's cultural background.
- Invite a parent to be a guest speaker at one of your group's gatherings.
- Remember each member's birthday with a card.
- Plan a special meeting or have an activity or ball game just for fun!

**Why help build positive relationships?** Research also tells us youth are directly impacted by relationships with caring adults. When young people feel adults in their lives care about them, they feel more connected to their community and relationships between generations are stronger and more meaningful. Communities will benefit from more engaged, connected youth.



## A Safe Environment

Another element in positive youth development is an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for young people. Youth should not fear physical or emotional harm while participating in your group activities. The learning environment with the adults and peers should be supportive and safe for youth. Young people will learn better and participate more fully when they are in an environment that encourages trust, honesty and respect among all youth and adults.

### In our youth group.....

- Do youth feel safe at our events and activities?
- Are children teased or ridiculed at our events or activities?
- Are the opinions of each member valued and respected by all participants?
- Is everyone willing to share ideas at meetings?
- Does everyone treat all others—members, parents and volunteers—equally?
- Are we flexible, but consistent?
- Are adults supportive rather than critical?
- Do youth believe their concerns and opinions are welcomed and valued?
- Are places where we meet or conduct activities accessible in terms of location, cost, disabled access?
- Is there an acceptable ratio of adults to youth at group activities?

### Some practices your group might want to implement to help develop a safe environment:

- Treat each child as an individual...remember he/she is a unique and special person.
- Make a conscious effort to choose words that “build up” rather than “tear down” youth.
- Train all adults on how to handle emergencies.
- Educate adults on working effectively with youth—child development, behavior, age appropriate activities.
- Establish group goals and activities with youth and adults working as equal partners.
- Pair up experienced and new members to help new members learn the customs and traditions of the group.
- Involve all group members in establishing and enforcing group rules for participation, interacting with others, and discipline.
- Establish agreed upon expectations for follow-through and responsibilities toward group activities.
- Consider family and community situations when dealing with group members having difficulty meeting group norms and expectations.

**Why provide a safe environment?** In safe environments, youth express their thoughts and ideas without fear of being laughed at and without fear of harm or danger. Youth and adults feel emotionally safe when there are no put-downs or disrespectful behavior. Learning, consistency and structure in youth activities help youth learn what is expected and to feel included.



## An Inclusive Environment

An inclusive environment allows participants to develop a sense of belonging. These environments also encourage and support participants and provide positive feedback. Community groups can provide opportunities for youth to “fit in” and be a part of activities that stress cooperation and shared goals. Healthy groups celebrate the success of all members and take pride in the collective efforts of all.

### In our youth group.....

- Do youth and adults feel included rather than excluded?
- Do youth and adults feel a sense of belonging?
- Do youth and adults feel valued and needed?
- Are youth actively involved in planning and implementing programs and activities?
- Are youth and adults sensitive to cultural or physical barriers deterring youth participation?

### Some practices your group might want to implement to help develop an inclusive environment:

- Provide activities where there are no losers.
- Have an induction ceremony for new members.
- Have members bring a "show and tell" representing their cultural heritage.
- Assign new members a mentor or a friendly helper.
- Include all group members in sharing the highlights of a group activity or event. Welcome comments and questions.
- Celebrate important milestones with ceremonies or special occasions.
- Confront cliques or behaviors that exclude someone from group events.
- Include a team building activity in each meeting.
- Develop group t-shirts, buttons, hats, or other items to show members belong to the group.

**Why provide an inclusive environment?** All youth want and need to feel they belong...whether at home, at school, or in other groups. Community groups can give youth opportunities to --fit-in" and engage in activities that stress cooperation and shared goals. When youth feel they fit in, they are more apt to contribute to the group and to engage in positive peer relationships that benefit your community, too.

**Does your 4-H Club provide the  
opportunity for mastery?**



## Opportunity for Mastery

Opportunity for mastery is the building of knowledge, skills and attitudes and then demonstrating their competent use to others. Community programs can provide settings where youth can acquire knowledge and learn new skills. Research shows that opportunities for reflection on these skills can help youth transfer what they learn to other areas of their life.

Youth mastery will vary by a youth's own developmental stage and learning style. Mastery is a process that takes time and repetition and can contribute to preparation for adult employment.

### **In our youth group.....**

Do youth get assistance and guidance in selecting activities appropriate for their developmental level?

Do youth set individual and group goals? Are they held accountable for these goals?

Are members allowed to practice skills until they master them?

Do youth reflect and receive feedback on their accomplishments?

Do youth and adults receive public recognition for their achievements?

Are members encouraged to continue after successes and after failures?

Are there sequential and age-appropriate learning opportunities?

Do youth programs provide opportunities for youth to feel a sense of progress, achievement or accomplishment?

### **Some practices your group might want to implement to help develop opportunities for mastery:**

- Provide opportunities for youth to practice skills needed to accomplish certain tasks.
- When possible, structure activities to include different styles -- use group activities, pair and triad work, and multi-sensory activities.
- Help group members work on projects based on their interests.
- Pair a younger youth with an older youth for an activity. Encourage the older youth to mentor and teach the younger person.
- Encourage youth to make presentations at activities or events. Recognize them for their efforts.

**Why provide opportunities for mastery?** Youth need opportunities to achieve physically, intellectually and socially. Through practice they develop skills for living and learning as well as better problem solving and decision-making. By developing competency and mastering certain skills, they increase their self-confidence and enthusiasm for learning.



## Engagement in Learning

Youth benefit from opportunities to experience meaningful challenge. Success at these experiences helps youth develop a personal sense of importance and to be engaged in learning. Youth must see the activities as demanding, novel and creative and to feel challenged to accomplish them. If youth are not engaged in learning, they may not experience personal growth from the activity.

### **In our youth group.....**

- Do youth identify needs and set goals to meet these needs?
- Do youth help design group activities and their structure?
- Do youth have the opportunity to lead groups and recruit other youth to be involved?
- Are youth allowed to assume responsible leadership positions in group activities?
- Do youth have opportunities to utilize social, interpersonal and communication skills?

### **Some practices your group might want to implement to provide opportunities for engaged learners:**

- Mix hand-on activities, group projects and paper and pencil exercises in group activities.
- Educate adults on using multi-faceted teaching approaches that include group investigation, experiential learning, and multiple outcomes.
- Model that failure and frustration are part of the learning process.
- After a group activity, provide time for reflection and application of skills and learning to other areas.
- Provide feedback to youth.
- Encourage youth to improve their skills through goal setting and challenges.

**Why is it important for youth to be engaged in learning?** Development is something that young people do for themselves with help from parents and communities. To foster development, youth need to be engaged and know that they make a difference. Theory suggests that youth develop a sense of self and identity through acting, taking on challenges and making meaningful contributions.

**Does your 4-H Club prepare youth for  
independence?**



## Opportunities for Self-Determination

The premise of this element of positive youth development is that youth are encouraged to try new things and learn about themselves. As a result, they discover and practice their individual interests and skills, test their independence and take control of their lives. Self-determination provides youth opportunities to feel they have control in their lives—that they can make a some personal decisions. Using individual likes and dislikes, interests and skills, youth can make choices.

### **In our youth group.....**

- Are youth challenged to attempt new things or learn new skills?
- Do youth have an opportunity to learn something about themselves?
- Do youth have the opportunity to be someone special?
- Are there opportunities for youth to apply skills and knowledge to their everyday lives?
- Do youth set up their own rules and guidelines for behavior within the group?

### **Some practices your group might want to implement to provide opportunities for self-determination:**

- Allow time at meetings and events for youth to share their experiences.
- Provide opportunities for older youth to mentor or be a “Big Friend” to younger youth.
- Provide opportunities for older youth to plan, implement and evaluate an activity for younger youth.
- Encourage youth to participate in decision-making activities at the local level and beyond.
- Make certain that young people are heard and taken seriously.
- Provide opportunities for youth to experience meaningful challenges.
- Provide leadership opportunities for youth.
- When youth are expected to work on projects, allow them to organize their work to fit their style.
- When choosing an activity to do as a group, help them explore different options before making the group decision.
- When choosing a community service project, survey interests and hobbies of group members before helping them design the project.

**Why provide opportunities for self-determination?** If given opportunities for independent thinking and taking on personal responsibility, youth will develop a sense of who they are. Youth need opportunities to experiment with different choices, evaluate what happens because of them, and consequently learn to improve the quality of their decisions.



## Opportunity to See One's Self as an Active Participant in the Future

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Youth need opportunities for new experiences and opportunities to enjoy life. They learn and grow from success and failures. Youth will begin to make life choices that will begin the transition into the future.

### **In our youth group.....**

- Do youth set goals and work toward their goals?
- Do youth have an opportunity to think about life plans and their future?
- Do youth have the opportunity to learn about and develop hobbies and leisure interests?
- Do youth take healthy risks?
- Do youth assume responsibility for decisions they make?

### **Some practices your group might want to implement to provide opportunities for seeing one's self in the future:**

- Provide opportunities for youth to assess their work—what changes need to be made to turn failure into success?
- Encourage youth to explore hobbies and interests and consider how these might become marketable skills in the workforce.
- Incorporate discussions of careers into group activities, programs or events.
- Make connections between activities, school work and careers.
- Encourage youth to try new activities and roles in the group.
- Have older youth tell younger youth about opportunities when they are older.
- Match youth skills and talents to needs of the group.
- Use interviews and/or resumes to determine youth roles in group activities.

### **Why is it important for youth to see themselves as active participants in the future?**

The more experiences youth have, the better they will be able to see themselves in the future. Giving youth opportunities to think about how they want to live in the future will aid them in making better life choices.

**Does your 4-H Club instill the value of  
generosity?**



## Opportunity to Value and Practice Service to Others

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Service is a way for youth to gain exposure to the larger community and to the world itself. Young people should feel free to contribute their skills, ideas and time to their community. They should also feel their contributions are accepted, acknowledged, and appreciated.

### **In our youth group.....**

- Are youth encouraged to use their time and energy in helping others?
- Are there opportunities for youth to identify community needs and develop service plans to meet these needs?
- Do all youth and adults participate in service projects?
- Are youth and adults recognized for their service?
- Do youth know that others value their community service contributions?
- Do youth report the impact of volunteer service?

### **Some practices your group might want to implement to provide opportunities for service to others:**

- Have your group plant a tree or some flowers for the community.
- Fill school bags with supplies to donate to schools for students needing them.
- Help senior citizens obtain and install smoke alarms.
- Model helping behavior by assisting a stranger with a small challenging task.
- Organize activities with service as the primary goal.
- Reflect at group meetings following a service activity.
- Provide opportunities for youth to learn about their community through programs and projects with local agencies, government groups, service organizations, etc.

**Why provide opportunities for service?** Community service and citizenship activities provide a means for youth to connect to communities and to learn to give back to others. Research shows that youth with opportunities for service better understand the 'big picture' of life and find purpose and meaning in their own lives.