

4-H Youth Development Ideals

1. To experience INDEPENDENCE

I pledge my head to clearer thinking. . .

Youth need to know that they are able to influence people and events through decision-making and action. By exercising independence through 4-H leadership opportunities, youth mature in self-discipline and responsibility, learn to better understand themselves and become independent thinkers.

Youth need to learn that decisions they make need to be considered carefully and acted upon only after the implications of those decisions are explored and weighed. 4-H club projects allow members to make choices about such things as design and coordinating materials not to mention selection of topics that are valuable to them. This gives youth a base of experience on how to make decisions and enables youth to face the more important choices that must be made later in life.

Youth are given leadership positions in 4-H clubs that allow them to work with other member and take responsibility for some of many of the decisions and/or actions that were once solely those of adults. Organization skills, patience and group dynamics are key traits learned here that become priceless assets to youth as they mature into contributing adults in society. Many of these same traits are taught to members as they participate as followers or team participants in group settings. Young people are not just the leaders of tomorrow—they have great untapped potential for responsible leadership today.

2. To experience BELONGING

I pledge my heart to greater loyalty. . .

Youth need to know they are cared about by others and feel a sense of connection to others in the group. This “fellowship” has always been an important part of a 4-H experience. 4-H gives youth the opportunity to feel physically and emotionally safe while actively participating in a group. Current research emphasizes the importance for youth to have opportunities for long-term consistent relationships with adults other than parents. This research suggests that a sense of belonging may be the single most powerful positive ingredient we can add into the lives of children and youth.

Working in clubs through 4-H strengthens and reinforces social skills that will allow youth to co-exist and thrive with others in society. Success in life rarely comes to an individual without some type of personal interaction with others. 4-H members learn early on the value of cooperation in their project work and activities.

3. To experience GENEROSITY

I pledge my hands to larger service. . .

Youth need to feel their lives have meaning and purpose. By participating in 4-H community service and citizenship activities, youth can connect to communities and learn to give back to others. It's clear that these experiences provide the foundation that helps us understand the "big picture" of life and find purpose and meaning.

Community service projects allow 4-H club members to see that their effort to help others is important and valuable. Youth learn that they do not live in a secluded world, but instead it is indeed a global community, which requires awareness and compassion of others.

4. To experience MASTERY

I pledge my health to better living. . .

In order to develop their self-confidence youth need to feel and believe they are capable and they must experience success at solving problems and meeting challenges to develop their self-confidence. By exploring 4-H projects and activities, youth master skills to make positive career and life choices. To do so, youth must have access to quality research-based content and have the opportunity to learn by doing. Additionally, youth need to have a safe environment for making mistakes and getting feedback, not just through competition but also as an ongoing element of participation. Finally, youth need the breadth and depth of topics that allow them to pursue their own interests.

The subject matter skills taught in 4-H projects are the foundation for the youth development that occurs in 4-H clubs. Learning how to sew, cook, repair machinery, do woodworking and care for others are just a few of the skills taught in 4-H that can be of economic, social and/or personal value to youth in their future.

By participating in club projects and activities members are given the opportunity to explore possibilities for future careers. It is just as important for youth to discover in a non-threatening setting that certain vocations may not be right for them. Many 4-H alumni report that the enjoyment and sense of mastery they experienced through their most successful 4-H project work laid the seed for future employment.

By giving public presentations in clubs 4-H members learn to deal with one of society's greatest fears—speaking before audiences. Being able to defend one's position publicly as well as rationally will serve youth well in future employment and school interviews, job presentations, social occasions and in performing many civic duties.

Source: National 4-H Headquarters, USDA: Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service; Washington, D.C.