

The Ohio 4-H Youth Development Program



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Vision – Ohio 4-H Youth Development is the state’s premier leader in developing youth to become positive productive citizens and catalysts for effective change to improve our diverse society.

Mission – 4-H Youth Development education creates positive environments for diverse youth and adults to reach their fullest potential as capable, competent, caring and contributing citizens.

Values – We believe that...

- Youth Development is the focus of everything we do;
- Partnerships are essential to successful youth development;
- Volunteerism is fundamental to our work;
- Strength is attained from diversity across the entire range of 4-H experiences

What We Believe

4-H is a community of young people across America learning leadership, citizenship, and life skills. OSU Extension’s 4-H program builds upon a century of experience as it fosters positive youth development that is based on the needs and strengths of youth, their families, and communities. Ohio 4-H follows the principles of experiential learning, and draws on the knowledge base of The Ohio State University and other institutions of higher education in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. The Ohio 4-H Program’s vision and mission clearly articulate that we will change the world by changing today’s youth.

What Are the Developmental Needs of Youth that the 4-H Program Addresses?

Youth development research emphasized the importance of meeting the four basic human needs of belonging, generosity, independence, and mastery. Studies indicate that youth whose needs are met in positive ways are likely to develop into active citizens and contributing members of their families and communities. The Ohio 4-H program strives to provide every youth the opportunity to participate in 4-H experiences that strengthen a young person’s sense of belonging, generosity, independence, and mastery. Dr. Cathann Kress, Director of Youth Development, National 4-H headquarters, describes how 4-H meets the needs of youth:¹

- **Belonging** – Youth need to know they are cared about by others and feel a sense of connection to others in a group. 4-H gives youth the opportunity to feel physically and emotionally safe while actively participating in a group.
- **Generosity** – Youth need to feel their lives have meaning and purpose. By exploring 4-H community service and citizenship activities, youth can connect to communities and learn to give back to others.
- **Independence** – 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 and learn to better understand themselves and become independent thinkers.
- **Mastery** – Youth need to feel and believe they are capable, and experience success at solving problems and meeting challenges to develop their self-confidence. Through the exploration of ideas and activities related to their interests, youth learn skills and participate in experiences that help them make positive career and life choices for their future.





4-H is a community of young people across America who are learning leadership, citizenship and life skills.

What are the key elements to a positive youth development experience in Ohio 4-H?

4-H programs address the needs of young people by focusing on their strengths and capacities. Ohio 4-H utilizes a positive youth development framework that includes eight key elements² identified by a national research group. The key elements of a 4-H experience are the “best practices” that help staff and volunteers address the four basic developmental needs of belonging, generosity, independence, and mastery.

OSU Extension’s 4-H program utilizes the following key elements for positive experiences by providing opportunities...

1. For a positive relationship with a caring adult

How young people come to understand what it means and what it takes to be a productive citizen, as well as the belief in themselves, depends largely on the adult role models and connection they have. A caring adult serves as a guide, mentor, and role model.

2. For a welcoming environment

A welcoming environment is one that allows for a sense of belonging to develop, encourages and supports its members, and offers encouragement with positive and specific feedback.

3. For mastery and competency in a chosen activity or subject matter area

Opportunities for success and achievement for youth serve as building blocks for a youth’s success not only in youth organizations but also in their school and community work. Mastery is the building of knowledge, skills, and attitudes and then demonstrating the competent use of this knowledge and skill. Through hands-on projects and activities, youth gain new knowledge and have the opportunity to immediately apply that new knowledge to individual projects and activities they are engaged in.

4. To value and practice service for others

Service is a way for youth to gain exposure to the larger community and the world. It is necessary for youth to actively practice and treasure service. Many times this experience enables young people to recognize the difference that they can make for others and their communities.

5. For an emotionally and physically safe environment

Youth should not fear physical or emotional harm from learning environments, adults who work with them, or from youth. Through extensive training and development opportunities, volunteers and staff are equipped with the tools to provide safe environments for youth to grow and develop in a positive way.

6. For self-determination

Ohio youth must believe that they can have impact over life’s events rather than life’s events having control of their lives. Youth programs must foster the personal sense of influence that youth have over their lives and provides opportunities to exercise this potential to become self-directing and autonomous adults for the future.

7. For engagement in learning

Youth programs provide for self-reflection that enables youth to connect what they are learning today to their future. While youth are learning about specific subject matter, being engaged in hands-on learning provides opportunities to develop important life skills (i.e., problem solving, decision making, teamwork, communication, etc.). These life skills are essential to both careers and avocations.

8. To see one’s self as an active participant in the future

Providing youth with the opportunity to see themselves in the future gives them the hope and optimism to shape their life choices accordingly. We can teach all the facts and figures we want in various subject matter areas, but if we don’t link them to their future, those facts and figures may go unused. Youth programs must be committed to positive youth development that makes a connection from today’s activities to tomorrow’s success.

The 4-H Pledge
 I pledge...
 My **head** to clearer thinking,
 My **heart** to greater loyalty,
 My **hands** to larger service and
 My **health** to better living, for my Club, my
 Community, my Country and my World.

Written by Jeff King, State 4-H Leader, OSU Extension

Resources

- ¹Kress, C.(2005). The Essential Elements of 4-H Youth Development [video]. Morgantown: West Virginia University.
- ²National 4-H Impact Assessment Project. (2001). Prepared and engaged youth. U.S. Department of Agriculture: Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service: Washington, DC.



All educational programs conducted by Ohio State University Extension are available to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, creed, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, gender, age, disability or Vietnam-era veteran status.