KNOWLEDGE OF SUBJECT MATTER
Educational Design and Delivery Domain

Education in the subject matter a volunteer will be teaching is critical to their success[1,2]. The concept of mastery through subject matter learning is actually at the core of 4-H positive youth development's essential elements. Cathann Kress[3] best described the role of mastery in the 4-H program in this statement:

> "By pledging their health to better living, 4-H youth are experiencing opportunities for mastery and developing their self-confidence. Mastery does not mean competition, though during county fair time some people confuse the concepts. Mastery has very little to do with competition but has everything to do with an opportunity for a young person to be meaningfully engaged in learning. Being meaningfully engaged is important, because 4-H is all about discovery and hands-on learning and the search for significance. 4-H activities are not busy work. In 4-H, young people are engaged in learning that is important and meaningful to them."

More recently, the 4-H Thriving Model developed by Mary Arnold[4,5] furthered the mastery concept through connections to youth program quality and the opportunity for skill building. Building on the work of Eccles and Gootman[6], the idea that youth and adults need to develop appropriate physical, psychological, intellectual, emotional, and social skills as they grow and develop and respond to diverse situations was established as a core program quality component. This is one piece of the total positive youth development puzzle where the engagement of a volunteer can help position youth toward a thriving trajectory.

As a volunteer, putting your subject matter knowledge into practice creates the potential to inspire the spark for the youth you serve. You definitely do not need to have all the answers. Youth are engaged when you share your experiences and are willing to learn with them. Modeling the process of learning how to learn will help youth to develop lifelong learning practices as they work to develop mastery of skills and subject matter. It has been found that volunteers who use their own subject matter knowledge along with 4-H curriculum and lesson plans result in greater youth learning[7].

Your local and national 4-H program are rich sources of resources, curriculum, and training to help you be successful. 4-H project curricula include research-based guides for leaders that apply hands-on teaching experiences for youth in the specific subject matter and give directions for facilitating and processing those experiences to develop specific life skills.

References

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The original resource 4-H Educational Design and Delivery: Knowledge of Subject Matter (VRKC: Volunteer Research, Knowledge, & Competency Taxonomy) was developed by Pam Larson Nippolt.