

DEVELOPING LIFE SKILLS

Positive Youth Development Domain

4-H is based on a positive youth development (PYD) approach that recognizes all youth have interests, abilities, and strengths that participation in 4-H programs can enhance. Research shows that participation in high quality 4-H programs increases thriving in youth, and thriving youth achieve important developmental outcomes, such as academic motivation and achievement^{1,2}.

Youth learn life skills through group and individual experiences in 4-H projects, activities, and events. The challenge for volunteers is to strengthen life skills development during these learning and leading experiences. When volunteers plan for reinforcing skill development, it allows youth to apply what they have learned to other situations. The more opportunities a youth takes part in, the greater the influence on the life skill development³. The result of “learning by doing” is youth who are equipped to live positive and productive lives.

The 4-H Thriving Model (Figure 1) predicts that youth who participate in 4-H programs that provide a high-quality developmental context (sparks, relationships, belonging) will thrive, and that thriving youth achieve key developmental outcomes. When we talk about thriving, we mean a specific set of life skills that predict youth development outcomes. We refer to this set of life skills as the thriving trajectory because it occurs over time.

Components of a Thriving Trajectory

4-H includes opportunities for youth to:

- Develop an intrinsic motivation and willingness to try new challenges. Youth learn, grow, and get better through effort and being open to challenge and discovery.
- Cultivate a growth mindset that emphasizes effort in learning over innate ability. Youth believe that they can get better at things by working hard, being persistent, and changing strategies when what they are doing isn't working.
- Believe in a hopeful future and purpose in life. Research shows that youth with a sense of purpose are more goal-oriented and have better emotional well-being⁴.
- Connect with something greater than the self that provides meaning and purpose in life and shapes everyday thoughts and actions. Transcendent awareness results from interactions with others to develop clarity and commitment to values, and beliefs. These commitments provide the foundation for youth actions toward moral living and contribution to others.
- Show the positive social values of respect, honesty, responsibility, empathy, and helping. Prosocial youth care about others and take actions that reflect caring.
- Express and manage emotions appropriately and effectively.
- Set and manage goals, with perseverance toward goal



achievement. Self-regulation is a key skill for goal management and future orientation.

Volunteers help youth develop these critical life skills by:

- Encouraging them to try challenging things and take positive risks to learn by doing
 - Developing project activities and lessons that are progressive and sequential so that one skill is learned in relationship to previous skills
 - Cultivating a growth mindset through the power of “not yet.” A youth member may say, “I can’t do this.” Teach youth to practice saying, “I can’t do this *yet*.”
 - Increasing a sense of hope and purpose by helping them label their individual strengths and contributions
 - Modeling moral behaviors and helping them reflect on their own values, actions, and contributions
- Facilitating activities so that all youth feel like they belong and matter to others
 - Encouraging youth to observe and remember behaviors that are rewarded
 - Modeling positive ways to express emotions rather than hiding feelings or expressing them in negative ways
 - Encouraging them to express emotions such as disappointment and frustration by labeling and acknowledging the feeling and developing skills to cope with powerful emotions
 - Teaching them how to set a goal, develop strategies to reach the goal, and to identify what roadblocks may happen so that when they occur, they can overcome them more easily.

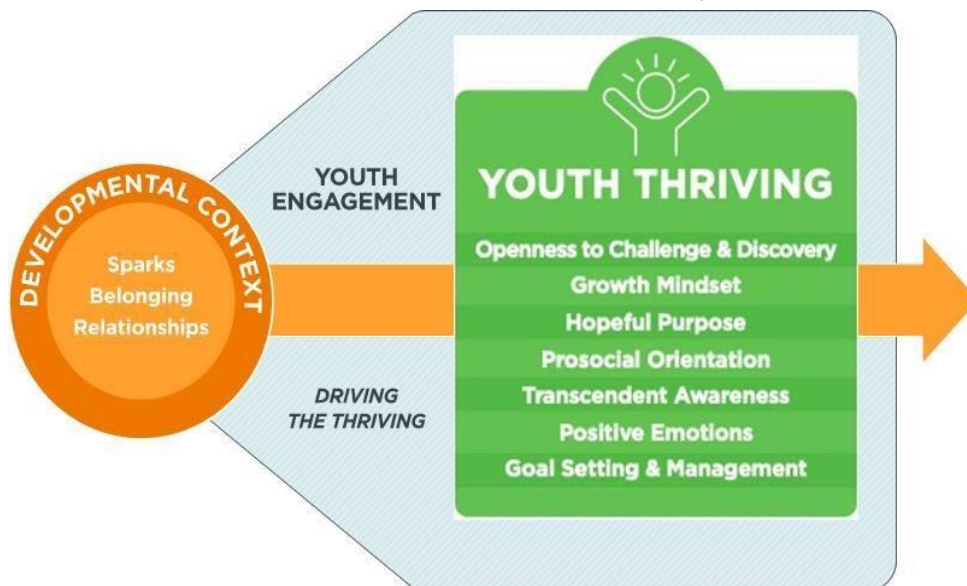


Figure 1. The 4-H Thriving Model¹.



VOLUNTEER

Research Knowledge Competency

References

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