

ABILITY TO MOTIVATE AND ENCOURAGE YOUTH

Positive Youth Development Domain

To be motivated means to be moved to do something. To encourage means to give support and advice to someone so they will do or continue to do something.

Encouraging youth to “get motivated” can be an unpredictable role for the 4-H volunteer. It is unpredictable because it depends on the personalities and attitudes of the youth, the sense of friendship and teamwork the youth have in the group, and the family, home, and school situations of the youth. There can be many different types of motivation; however, the two most common forms are intrinsic and extrinsic.

Intrinsic motivation comes from within, while extrinsic motivation arises from external factors. When you are intrinsically motivated, you engage in an activity because you enjoy it and get personal satisfaction from doing it. When you are extrinsically motivated, you do something to gain an external reward or avoid an unpleasant outcome⁴.

Volunteers can use both types of motivation because both are useful. Let’s say a sixteen-year-old youth wants to become a veterinarian, but this requires education beyond high school. The youth may not naturally enjoy spending extra time and effort in getting good grades but are very happy when their extra effort results in academic achievement. The external reward is getting accepted into college. They were extrinsically motivated, but the accomplishment provides a sense of internal satisfaction because it allows them to reach their career goals⁴. Every person is different, so get to know the young person,

find out what their goals are, and then you can support what they truly enjoy doing.

A Thriving Orientation

In 4-H, positive youth development (PYD) is the idea that all youth have the potential for bright futures. Many youth are naturally motivated by their sparks; the things that interest them. As their mentor, continue to create unique and multiple opportunities for them to pursue their sparks and ensure that they belong, which helps youth stay engaged in the program over time. This encourages positive developmental relationships to form between peers and adults. The combination of these factors helps point youth toward a thriving orientation¹. According to the 4-H Thriving Model, to help youth continue a thriving trajectory, volunteers should generate experiences that encourage the following seven behaviors:

- An openness to challenge & discovery: They enjoy a challenge and like to explore new things.
- A growth mindset: They embrace new experiences as a growth opportunity and welcome challenges.
- A hopeful purpose: They have a sense of purpose in life, and optimism for the future.
- A pro-social orientation: They are respectful, honest, responsible, caring, and value helping others.
- Transcendent awareness: They strive to connect with something bigger than themselves.

- Positive emotionality: They are generally optimistic and can manage their emotions.
- Self-regulation and goal setting: They set goals and persevere, adjusting when necessary to achieve those goals.

With opportunities to discover their greatest passions and positive networks of youth and adults to assist them, high-quality 4-H programs help youth thrive.

Growth Mindset

A youth's mindset - how they perceive their abilities, also plays a key role in their motivation and achievement. Dweck³ found that if they changed students' mindsets, they could boost a student's achievement. More specifically, the adults helped children focus on the process that leads to learning, like hard work and trying new strategies. Dweck³ says a growth mindset isn't just about putting forth more effort. Effort is key to getting better at something, but youth need to try new strategies when they are stuck and seek input from others. As an adult mentor, you must appreciate their work so far, but add: "Let's talk about what you've tried, and what you can try next." The growth mindset approach helps children feel good in the short term with praise, and in the long term, by helping them see challenges as something normal, rather than threatening.

Encouragement Techniques

There are many different techniques you can use to help youth reach the seven thriving indicators mentioned above. A common 4-H tradition is to use awards or prizes, and for some youth, this extrinsic form of motivation works. But motivation and encouragement methods are not a one-size-fits-all. Through the perspectives of youth participants, Bates et al.² identified several ways adults could design a program that would increase youth engagement, participation, and skill development. Instrumental supports include:

1. Caring Adult Leaders: Youth listen to adults who treat them like friends or family. This support and encouragement were appreciated even when the adult pushed them outside of their comfort zone.
2. Working with Younger Youth: Older youth find it is fun to teach others and it motivates them to learn and practice the skills they are teaching. Younger youth naturally look up to and are motivated by older youth, including siblings.
3. Having Fun: Make dedicated time for icebreakers, games, and fun activities to make their experience in the program enjoyable. If it's not fun, kids tend to lose interest quickly.
4. Building Relationships: Youth need to feel liked, appreciated, and noticed for their individuality. Sharing food is a good way to connect but be aware of food allergies.

5. **Safe, Supportive, Accepting and Motivating Climate:** A mentor shouldn't judge a person's background, or decisions, but maximize opportunities for self-growth and acceptance. Belonging is important.
6. **Appropriate Level of Challenge:** If an activity is too difficult or too easy, there is little incentive to continue. Identify ways to challenge learning and growth in small but steady steps.
7. **Access to New Experiences, Places, and People:** Youth join 4-H to make friends and learn new things. Field trips, guest speakers, or group activities such as camping or kayaking, can stimulate interest in learning. We are here to teach children how to enjoy the world around them as well as project content.
8. **Hands-on Opportunities and Activities to Practice Skills:** Encourage youth to try new things, even if they are uncertain, they can succeed. Youth need adults to give them the space to fail and use "mistakes" as teachable moments.
9. **Sense of Pride:** Competitions can be a motivator and often bring a sense of pride and satisfaction in a job well done, but so can the desire to "help others", "be a good role model" or "have my voice heard." Celebrate accomplishments at each level of achievement, including being a good citizen.

To help youth thrive, 4-H adults should first and foremost focus on providing a developmental context that includes a commitment to youth sparks, belonging, developmental relationships, and engagement strategies. It is only after a solid groundwork of trust, mutual warmth, and respect has been laid, that adults can effectively encourage and ultimately motivate youth to persevere to reach their goals.

References

- ¹Arnold, M. E., & Gagnon, R. J. (2019). Illuminating the process of youth development: *The mediating effect of thriving on youth development program outcomes*. *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension*, 7(3), 24-51.
- ²Bates, S., Anderson-Butcher, D., Ferrari, T., Clary, C. (2020). *A comparative examination of how program design components influence youth leadership-skill development*. *Journal of Youth Development*, 15(6), 91-115.
- ³Dweck, C. (2015, September 23). *Growth mindset, revisited*, A Commentary. *Education Week*. 35(5), 20-24.
- ⁴Ryan, R.M., Deci, E.L. (2020). *Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions*. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25, 54-67.

The original resource 4-H Positive Youth Development: Ability to Motivate & Encourage Youth (VRKC: Volunteer Research, Knowledge, & Competency Taxonomy) was developed by Vicki J. Schwartz.

VRKC Fact Sheet Series provided by
Program Leaders Working Group: 4-H Volunteerism Committee

Authors (September 2022)
Lena Hosking, Oregon State University
Gemma Miner, University of California
T. Ashley Burns, Ph.D., Clemson University
Jen Loble, University of Maine

