



Designing Age-Appropriate Learning Experiences

Providing experiences for young people that address healthy development and that focus on family relationships is the goal of Michigan 4-H Youth activities. That's why 4-H is committed to providing and supporting learning environments that are safe, appropriate, healthy and fun for youth aged 5 to 19 at all developmental stages.

The Experiential Learning Process

4-H Youth Development programs are developed to ensure that young people actively learn using hands-on educational opportunities. Learning materials, programs and events are designed to provide adults and

professionals who work with young people the tools they need to offer a “Do-Reflect-Apply” experiential learning process in which young people complete five important steps.

Do

- Young people **experience** an activity, which involves exploring or discovering something related to the learning topic.

Reflect

- Young people **share** by describing what happened or what they experienced. When young people share what they've learned, they not only stimulate their own growth, but the growth of their group as well.

- Young people **process** what they've learned and shared in order to look for patterns or themes, with the goal of building a bridge to new knowledge and skills.

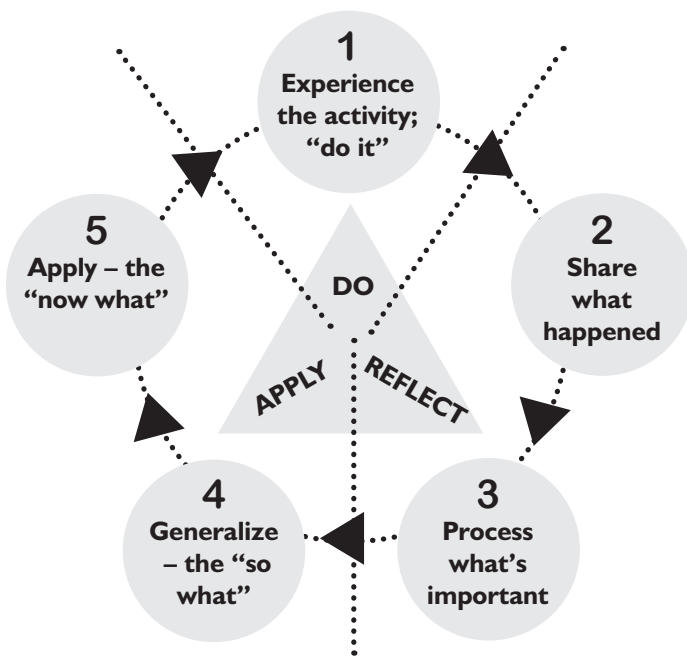
Apply

- Young people **generalize** from this experience to implications related to their own lives or to broader societal experiences.
- Young people **apply** or think about what can be done with their newly acquired information or skill.

Each of these steps is accomplished through positive and appropriate questions, encouragement and support provided by the caring adults who work with youth. The overall goal of the experiential learning process is to provide young people with positive learning experiences and tools for ongoing use in their lives, and with the enthusiasm to put these tools into action.

When you offer experiential learning opportunities that are developmentally appropriate and appealing to young people at the different ages and stages of their lives, you provide environments proven to foster positive youth development.

“Learn By Doing”: The Experiential Learning Model



From *Curriculum Development for Issues Programming: A National Handbook for Extension Youth Development Professionals* (1992), Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, pp. 27–28. Also in Pfeiffer, J. W., and Jones, J. E. (1985). *The Reference Guide to Handbooks and Annuals*, Vol. 1–10, 1972–1985. San Diego, CA: University Associates Publishers and Consultants.

The Ages and Stages of Child and Youth Development*



* The information in this section is adapted from *Ages and Stages of Child and Youth Development: A Guide for 4-H Leaders* (Karnes & Myers-Walls, 1996) and *Michigan 4-H Programming Committees: A Plan for the Future* (Nelson, 1990).

As a 4-H club volunteer – whether you work with children of only one developmental stage or varying stages of development – you will need to understand how young people grow, develop and learn in order to plan more effective programs with them. The following overview discusses common physical, cognitive (thinking), social and emotional characteristics for 5- to

8-year-old children, early adolescents (young people aged 9 to 15) and older youth (aged 15 to 19). However, as you review this information, remember that children develop on differing timetables and changes are gradual. Members may appear mature and responsible on one occasion and immature and bored the next. You can help make 4-H a rewarding and fulfilling experience for your members – and simultaneously help them grow and develop – by accepting them at their current developmental stage and by offering challenging experiences that will help them make the transition into their next stage.

Five- to Eight-Year-Olds

About the Major Developmental Changes

When working with 5- to 8-year-olds or school-aged children, it's important to think about the developmental changes these young people are going through. It is also necessary to consider how these changes affect how you work with children in this age group. Keeping children's development in mind will help ensure fun and learning for all – adults and children alike!

What follows are the characteristics related to children's physical, thinking, social and emotional development during the 5- to 8-year-old stage, along with implications these characteristics have for working with children. Individual differences play a big role in how children behave and what they like to do. Sometimes children's development is uneven. For example, while physically a child may look older than other children who are the same age, he or she may lag behind peers in social skills.

Furthermore, children are influenced by people and places: their families, their friends, their schools and their communities. Another important point to remember is that even though we look at specific aspects of the child's development to understand it better, each child is a "whole" child. Each child in your club, group and classroom is a "complete package."

Physical Development

School-aged children, or 5- to 8-year-olds, have slower growth rates than children in the early childhood years. They begin to refine their large (gross) and small (fine) motor skills, resulting in greater control of their bodies. They also are generally healthy and have lots of energy. What this means for those working with this age group is that children:

- Need opportunities to be physically active.
- Need times for group games and other recreational activities.
- Can participate in more complex arts and crafts projects with increased motor coordination.
- Gain a sense of independence from their increasing physical abilities.
- Develop greater self-esteem as they develop new physical skills.

Thinking Development

School-aged children are "here and now thinkers" who have not mastered abstract thinking. They are beginning to develop new memory skills. They begin to think more intuitively and develop hunches about things. During this developmental stage, children begin to improve their language abilities. Their vocabulary increases and they are able to express ideas and manipulate words. They also begin to increase their

APPENDIX C: Working Effectively With Youth

problem-solving abilities. They're learning to read and write, and they like to learn and use new skills.

Activities and programs for this age group should:

- Use real objects and materials and concrete, "real world" experiences. Children should be involved in activities with clear objectives and that use common materials.
- Match their new thinking skills to capitalize on shifts in cognitive development.
- Encourage them to talk about what they're doing to enhance learning through reflection. Stimulate their thinking skills by asking "How can we solve this problem?" and "What do you think will happen?" instead of giving answers.
- Be fun as well as educational.

Social Development

Children this age show a strong interest in friends. They may prefer to play with friends who are the same gender. They are beginning to develop self-discipline. They're also less self-centered and more sensitive to the needs of others than they used to be. It is at this time that they begin to understand the "rules" for how the social world functions.

These developments suggest that when working with this age group, volunteer leaders should:

- Plan activities that develop positive social interaction skills, such as learning how to be a friend, communication and helping others.
- Develop discipline strategies aimed at promoting self-discipline.
- Plan activities that promote cooperation (such as working in pairs or small groups), or games that involve teamwork.
- Allow youth to be involved in making the rules.

Emotional Development

During this developmental stage, 5- to 8-year-olds often seek adult approval and support. They may have

difficulty talking about feelings. They're concerned with fairness and see right and wrong as absolute. They begin to compare themselves with others. They may choose to work out fears by "acting out" or withdrawing.

When programming with this group:

- Allow time for individual, small and large group activities.
- Plan activities that focus on creative expression.
- Develop positive communication skills and discipline strategies. Model positive communication with adults and children.

"Jobs" of 5- to 8-Year-Olds

Each stage of life has "jobs" that each individual needs to learn in order to go on and live a healthy or productive life. Many people who study human development believe that if the jobs at a particular stage are not learned, people get stuck at this stage of development and will be less successful (at work, at home and within themselves) than those who master their jobs.

In the school-aged years between 5 and 8, children learn to:

- Gather information about who they are and what they can do.
- Develop a better understanding of how to get along with others.
- Understand that rules are necessary to make groups work.
- Act in ways that respect themselves and others.
- Improve their physical abilities.
- Learn to use language to share ideas and influence others.
- Find new ways to gather information and to solve problems.

Early Adolescents

About the Major Developmental Changes

Early adolescence, the stage of life between childhood and adolescence, is usually thought of as the ages of 10 to 14 or 9 to 15. The major changes that take place during these years make them an exciting, sometimes

scary time in the life of a child who is growing into an adolescent.

Physical Development

Puberty is the key to the physical changes in early adolescence. The hormonal changes that began when the child was between 5 and 9 increase. Bodies begin

APPENDIX C: Working Effectively With Youth

to change, and youth begin to see themselves differently! Girls go through growth spurts of between 2 and 6 inches a year, breast development, the appearance and growth of pubic and underarm hair, widening hips, smaller waistlines and, of course, the beginning of menstrual periods. In general, hormonal changes begin about two years later for boys, who go through growth spurts of up to 6 inches a year, muscle development, the appearance and growth of facial hair as well as pubic and underarm hair and, often, “wet dreams” (nocturnal emissions).

Thinking Development

At the same time physical changes are taking place, early adolescents begin to develop new ways of thinking. No longer caught in the “here-and-now” of childhood, they begin to develop higher level thinking skills that allow them to think about ideas, anticipate and begin to see a personal future. They may begin to question old beliefs and explore new ones, as well as to criticize the adults in their lives.

Social Development

Social changes occur during early adolescence for many reasons. They are brought about because of the body changes youth are going through and the new thinking they are beginning to develop. The freedom and responsibility that parents and society grant to youth also contribute to social changes, because early adolescents are allowed to do more things and go more

places. Peers become increasingly important during these years, a process that helps youth to gradually wean themselves from parents and become independent. Early adolescents also move from primarily having friends of the same gender to having friends of the opposite gender, marking the beginning of exploring and learning about male-female relationships.

Emotional Development

It’s not surprising that amidst all of these other changes, early adolescents sometimes feel unsure of themselves and need the support of adults. With many things changing both inside and outside of the early adolescent, life can seem pretty topsy-turvy at times. If early adolescents act like children one day and adults the next, it’s because that’s exactly how they’re feeling!

Jobs of Early Adolescents

Early adolescents have six interrelated jobs to accomplish during this stage of their lives:

- Increase positive feelings about themselves and who they are.
- Increase positive feelings about their changing bodies.
- Become more responsible and develop decision-making skills.
- Become increasingly independent.
- Develop better interpersonal communication skills.
- Begin to think about a plan for the future.

Older Youth

About the Major Developmental Changes

Adolescence has been described by some as a time of “storm and stress” and a time where one moment the teen acts as an adult and the next a child. Teens can be challenging, changing, wonderfully creative and stimulating individuals at this time of their development. Adolescence is also a time when a teen’s interest in club or group activities may change.

Older teens are still going through emotional, social and physical changes, just as they were in early adolescence; however, their need for adult support and leadership has changed. The needs of this group vary just as they do for youth at other ages of development.

Physical Development

Girls may have completed the rapid changes of early adolescence and have adjusted to their physical selves. Boys may continue to experience rapid physical changes and still be coping with the challenges of rapid physical growth. Both girls and boys have a better idea of their interests and talents and some spend hours perfecting those skills.

Thinking Development

Older teens may think about the world differently than young people aged 12 to 14. Though every teen is different, this is a time when teens in general want to be recognized as unique individuals and to be involved with activities and events that will help them explore

APPENDIX C: Working Effectively With Youth

their personal development, friendships and relationships with others. At this age, teens are looking for ways to demonstrate their independence, which they equate with getting a driver's license and making more of their own decisions.

In addition to wanting to be more independent, they're also making decisions about their future. This is a time for exploring and preparing for future careers. Many are concerned about what types of jobs they may be qualified for and concerned about their ability to succeed in the world of work. Choices are being made about colleges, trade schools or moving directly into the job market upon completion of high school.

Social Development

Many older teens prefer to carry out tasks with little or no supervision and have the ability to accomplish many tasks on their own. Relationship skills may be well developed and friendships that are formed can be very long-lasting. Teens at this age may meet the person they plan to marry and in some instances get married and have children.

Adults who work with youth at this age find that to be effective with this age group, they must take on different roles than they did when the teens were younger. They become facilitators and allow teens to take on more of a leadership role. Adults become mentors or advisors, helping to arrange new experiences for teens, yet letting the teens take more responsibility

and act more independently. Teens want adults to be a resource, a friend and someone who is available to help guide them when needed.

Emotional Development

The routines and structure of 4-H clubs, many times have lost their appeal for older teens. The demands of school, a job or social groups make it more difficult for these youth to stay actively involved. This is a time when many teens enjoy looking back on their accomplishments as an 8- to 10-year 4-H member. Older teens feel they have reached the stage of full maturity and expect to be treated as such.

Jobs of Older Youth

Older adolescents have six interrelated jobs to accomplish during this stage of their lives:

- Increase and maintain knowledge of self and self-esteem.
- Learn to be increasingly responsible and make complex decisions.
- Set goals and develop strategies to reach them.
- Become increasingly independent from parents.
- Develop strong relationship skills.
- Increase interpersonal communications skills.

Today these life skills are still necessary. If we expect youth to go into adulthood in a positive way, we can plan experiences to help them perform the jobs listed above.

Identifying Your Club Members' Place on the Development Continuum

Certainly this overview of the ages and stages of child and youth development cannot tell you all there is to know about the subject. Rather, it is meant to guide you as you plan your activities as a leader.

How can you best use this information? To pick up clues for planning successful activities, anticipating problems or challenging bored and lagging members, observe them and reflect on the physical, thinking, social and

emotional descriptions for their ages. Pick a time when the club members are involved in an activity. Notice the actions of one member at a time and think about the developmental stages. How does he or she:

- Follow directions?
- Behave (maturely or immaturely, responsibly or carelessly)?
- Respond when someone approaches?

References for Ages and Stages of Child and Youth Development

Karnes, J., & Myers-Walls, J. A. (1996). *Ages and stages of child and youth development: A guide for 4-H leaders* (NCR-292). West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University, Cooperative Extension Service. Available at <http://www.ces.purdue.edu/extmedia/NCR/NCR-292.html>

Nelson, C. (1990). *Michigan 4-H programming committees: A plan for the future*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Extension.

Tips for Effective Behavior Management



Effective behavior management is a means to help young people act and behave positively, and enjoy themselves. It should never be an end in and of itself; the best interests of the young person must always be paramount. Effective behavior management begins when, as the second Michigan 4-H Youth Development guiding principle states, young people are physically and emotionally safe. As the volunteer responsible for managing your 4-H club, it is your responsibility to reinforce positive – and address inappropriate – behaviors when they occur. The following tips were designed to help you work effectively with your 4-H club or group.

According to Konen and Elliott (1999), the keys to minimizing behavioral challenges are to:

Have a well-planned program.

Such a program requires good organization, strong leadership, and exciting, imaginative programs that are connected with your members' lives, needs and interests.

Set clear, simple and consistent behavioral expectations and consequences.

All individuals need to know the results of their actions. When working with young people, it is essential that expectations and consequences be clear, easily understood and consistent.

Provide individual attention to your members.

It is also crucial to provide individual attention to your members. The first Michigan 4-H Youth Development guiding principle speaks to this when it stresses the importance of encouraging and supporting “the development of positive, meaningful relationships [between members, adults and peers] that foster a sense of belonging and connectedness over time” (Michigan 4-H Youth Development, 2002). Behavior management through individual attention includes:

- *Public recognition of positive behavior.* One aspect of providing individual attention is publicly rewarding positive behavior. For more information about recognition, visit the “Michigan 4-H Recognition Program” Web page at <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/4h/staward.html>. You may also want to download *The Michigan 4-H Recognition Handbook* from <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/4h/downloads/recognitionhandbook.pdf>.

- *Addressing negative behavior.* If someone's safety is at stake, immediate action is necessary. However, most situations of negative behavior call for a balanced, reasonable, well-thought-out response. Such a response is immediate (close to the time of the offense), consistent (whenever such behavior is displayed, the consequences are the same), fair (related to the behavior and appropriate to its severity) and followed through. Konen and Elliott (1999) suggest four levels of consequence: (a) a private word of correction, (b) a timeout, (c) supervised isolation from the group and (d) permanent – at least until corrected behavior is assured – removal from the group.

If the behavior continues to be disruptive, you may also consider choosing a quiet time and speaking with the child's parents. Mention your concerns to them in a nonconfrontational, nonjudgmental way. Assure them that you are not being critical; rather that you are seeking insight into the child's development or behavior. If the parents would like your help and support, offer it. Suggest that they might want to check with the school to see if the child's teachers have similar concerns. Outside assistance may be needed.

Work as a team.

While individual attention is key, so is encouraging your members to work together as a team to set and achieve goals and expectations. This is reflected in the third and fourth Michigan 4-H Youth Development guiding principles that address the importance of engaging young people in their own development and viewing them as participants in the learning process.

References for Tips for Effective Behavior Management

- Konen, J. H., & Elliott, D. (1999). *Effective behavior management* (4H-022-99). Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Extension. Available at <http://ohioline.osu.edu/4h-fact/0022.html>
- Michigan 4-H Youth Development. (2002). *Michigan 4-H Youth Development guiding principles for positive youth development* (Rev. ed.). East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University.