
Essential Elements of 4-H Youth Development



4-H intentionally creates opportunities and provides environments rich with essential elements of positive youth development. In 1998, the National 4-H Impact Design Implementation Team formed a task force to study characteristics of effective programs for positive youth development. The team identified early studies (Konopka, G., 1973; Pittman, K., 1991) that revealed eight critical elements that must be present for positive and effective experiences and opportunities benefiting youth. Those critical elements are now known as the Eight Essential Elements:

1. A positive relationship with a caring adult.
2. A safe emotional and physical environment
3. An inclusive environment
4. Engagement in learning
5. Opportunity for mastery
6. Opportunity to see oneself as an active participant in the future
7. Opportunity for self-determination
8. Opportunity to value and practice service for others

The eight essential elements are standards for the effective practice of youth development work. These elements are also a framework to design and measure the effectiveness of the program environments and opportunities offered.

For a resource on the Essential Elements, visit the Colorado 4-H website Agent Resources page. <http://co4h.colostate.edu/ar//4-HEssentialElements.pdf>

4-H National Headquarters Fact Sheet on the Essential Elements:
http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/family/res/pdfs/Essential_Elements.pdf

Professional development resources on the Essential Elements: <http://www.4-h.org/resource-library/professional-development-learning/4-h-youth-development/youth-development/essential-elements/#Expand1>