

New
Jersey **4-H**

Leader Training Series



Life Skills in the 4-H Program

A primary goal of the 4-H Youth Development program of Rutgers Cooperative Extension is to help youth learn life skills.

These skills are abilities, which once developed, can be used in many ways throughout a lifetime. A life skill can be defined as

“an ability that is necessary and useful throughout life.” These skills include “thinking,” “doing,” and “feeling” abilities used in many situations. The life skills learned through our 4-H program are those which contribute positively to productive, healthy, and competent lives.



Life Skills

Learning together is the key to success. Planning programs *with* youth is sharing the leadership role and helping them develop the life skills they will need throughout their adult years.

In 4-H, the life skills that members learn are:

Enhancing Learning Skills—Developing an interest in learning and an inquiring mind. This is accomplished through hands-on learning, and includes capitalizing on curiosity and use of competitive and cooperative learning methods. 4-H’ers increase their abilities to identify needs and sources of knowledge.

Examples of activities which enhance learning skills are working on 4-H projects, preparing for a public presentation or foods demonstration, participating in a quiz bowl or animal clinic.

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Strengthening and Using Decision-Making Skills—Learning to make decisions, individually and collectively. This involves assessing needs and interests, identifying resources, setting goals and priorities and accepting the risk of taking action. 4-H'ers use their knowledge, skills and values in practicing this life skill.

Examples of activities which strengthen and use decision-making skills include planning a fund-raiser or other special club event, deciding what 4-H project to undertake for the year, deciding which animal to exhibit at the fair.

Developing a Positive Self-Concept—Self-concept is a belief about oneself which helps a person to successfully meet challenges and cope with issues of life. This includes recognizing your and others' values; appreciating cultural heritage of self and others; defining your role within family, peer group and society; and evaluating your strengths and weaknesses. In addition, developing self-concept involves building self-esteem and self-confidence, as well as learning to accept success and failure, criticism and praise.

Examples of activities which help 4-H'ers to develop a positive self-concept include completion of a project, doing something successfully for the first time (i.e., public presentations), participating in project evaluation, serving in leadership roles.

Communicating With and Relating to Other People—Developing communication skills that enhance the ability to understand and respect another's point of view. 4-H'ers also develop the ability to be objective, deal constructively with conflict and recognize and respect others' worth.

Activities that teach youth to communicate with and relate to other people include being in a club, public presentations, community service activities, participating in county-wide events, receiving newsletters, record-keeping, serving as camp counselors or in other leadership roles, participating in cooperative and competitive events.

Responding to the Needs of Others and the Community—Becoming aware of the concerns of the people who live there and taking action to meet the needs.

Activities which teach 4-H'ers to respond to the needs of others and the community include community service projects,

attending Citizenship Washington Focus, participating as youth members of advisory groups, environmental education projects, global education programs, inter-state/international exchanges.

Teaching Life Skills

Paid and volunteer staff of the 4-H Youth Development Program teach these skills through group and individual learning opportunities. These experiences may be 4-H projects, events, camps, club/group activities, or organized classes. While the learning experiences are “hands-on,” and deal with topics of current interest and relevance to the young person, they also develop basic, transferable skills useful in other settings. The challenge to you as a leader is to design, and encourage youth to participate in, experiences that build a variety of skills. Your job as a leader is to help young people reflect on how the skills learned apply in other times, places, and situations.

Planning 4-H Experiences

When planning 4-H learning experiences, ask yourself these questions:

- a. What are the life skills I want youth to learn?
- b. How can I teach these life skills through experiences?
- c. How can I reinforce use of these life skills in future situations?
- d. How can this life skill be used to strengthen family relationships?
- e. How can I involve youth as resources for subsequent teaching and/or reinforcement of these skills?
- f. How can I reinforce transferral of these skills?

The 4-H Youth Development Program is designed to help both youth and adults develop skills and cope successfully in an increasingly complex world.

4-H is Lifelong Learning . . . Active . . . “Hands-on” . . . and Fun!

Reference:

New Jersey 4-H Into the 21st Century - Prepared by Dr. Charles L. Lang in cooperation with the Long-Range Planning Task Force of the New Jersey Department of 4-H Youth Development and distributed to 4-H faculty. October 11, 1988

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