



HELPING  YOUTH
THRIVE
4-H THRIVING MODEL

**UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPMENTAL
RELATIONSHIPS**



BACKGROUND INFORMATION



What is needed is a widespread conceptual shift from thinking that youth problems are the principal barrier to youth development to thinking that youth development is the most effective strategy for the prevention of youth problems.

- KAREN PITTMAN

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Positive Youth Development (PYD) came into focus in the early 1990s as society struggled to address risk behaviors in teens. Among the earliest leaders in PYD is Karen Pittman. She coined the phrase “problem-free isn’t fully prepared” (Pittman & Fleming, 1991). Using research from Dr. Peter Benson (founder of the Search Institute) and others, Pittman began the paradigm shift from fixing behavior deficits to building and nurturing assets and skills. Pittman defined PYD as “an ongoing, inevitable process in which all youth are engaged, and all youth are invested.” She further defined that youth seek “ways to meet their basic physical and social needs and to build the individual assets or competencies (knowledge, skills, relationships, values) they feel are needed to participate successfully and fully in adolescence and adult life” (Pittman, 1993). From this early definition to today, most of those important components are engrained within the Thriving Model and are considered critical aspects of program quality.

The Positive Youth Development approach recognizes that all young people have interests, abilities, and

strengths and when engaged in the context of supportive adults, youth voice and other program quality standards, can grow and thrive, having a positive impact on the whole child. Research continued to advance the field of PYD with Dr. Richard Lerner’s longitudinal study that was completed in the early 2000s. This led to the 5C’s Model of PYD that provided insight on the outcomes youth gain. The Five Cs Outcomes of PYD are: Competence, Confidence, Character, Connection, and Caring. These five Cs are based on the adolescent development literature (Lerner, 2004) and represent language used by families, clinicians, and researchers for describing characteristics of thriving. Most recently, the 4-H Thriving Model was developed by Dr. Mary Arnold to provide a framework for understanding the processes that drives outcomes and translates the theory into PYD practices. The foundation of the 4-H Thriving Model is the Developmental Context of Sparks, Program Quality Principles with a focus on belonging, and Developmental Relationships. Youth Programs that incorporate these elements into program delivery set the stage for youth growing, learning, and thriving.



The field of positive youth development focuses on each and every child's unique talents, strengths, interests, and future potential.

- WILLIAM DAMON

DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

Developmental relationships are close connections between youth and adults that help “young people discover who they are, cultivate abilities to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them” (Roehlkepartain, Syversten, & Wu, 2017, p. 3). These positive relations between youth and adults are important across numerous contexts, including families, schools, communities, and youth development programs (Carter, 2013; Roehlkepartain et al., 2017; Roehlkepartain et al., 2018A; Roehlkepartain et al., 2018B). Search Institute has identified **five key elements of developmental relationships** that are expressed through specific actions and help young people achieve their potential: **express care, challenge growth, provide support, share power, and expand possibilities** (Roehlkepartain et al., 2017).

Developmental relationships begin by creating a strong attachment between youth and adults, reflected in mutual warmth, respect, trust, and inclusivity. Moreover, developmental relationships increase in complexity over time. As youth mature, their needs within the relationship will change to reflect their increased growth and development. As such, the dynamics of healthy relationships between youth and adults shift over time. Developmental relationships with younger youth are typically highly adult driven and determined. Youth-adult relationships across the adolescent years, however, reflect the young person's increasing competence, personal autonomy, decision making, and identity formation. As youth grow, an effective youth development program reflects these developmental changes through developmentally appropriate activities and relationships with adults.

Developmental relationships are also key to helping youth thrive. **Thriving** is a concept that is commonly described as a trajectory marked by pursuit of a **spark**, possessing a **growth mindset**, and developing effective **goal management** strategies (Arnold, 2018; Benson, 2008; Dweck, 2006). Furthermore, Search Institute (2014) describes **six indicators of youth thriving**: Openness to challenge and discovery; hopeful purpose; transcendent awareness; positive emotionality; pro-social orientation; and intentional self-regulation.

Relative to 4-H, youth will thrive when programs provide opportunities to explore sparks, focus on youth **belonging** as the most important aspect of **program quality**, and place an emphasis on developmental relationships*. It is incumbent on the educators to get to know each of the youth and provide an atmosphere and opportunity to the youth to express and explore themselves to develop relationships. Furthermore, it is important that 4-H programming includes a range of actions that promote **diversity, equity, and inclusion** (Search Institute, 2020), also referred to as DEI and sometimes with the addition of **justice** using the acronym JEDI. The 4-H Program Leaders Working Group has established the national Access, Equity and Belonging Committee (AEBC). The committee aims to contribute to an inclusive organizational culture by coordinating efforts. The **AEBC** website has extensive supports and resources to learn, practice and improve DEI skills.

*Note: In 4-H, developmental relationships are often referred to as youth-adult partnerships or relationships with caring adults.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS, SEE THE REFERENCES AND RESOURCES SECTION.

THRIVE HIGHLIGHT

A Search Institute study found that teachers/staff will see themselves as enforcing the rules fairly and treating people fairly, more so than what the youth report (79% to 73% and 87% to 67% respectively). It is important to seek out feedback on the developmental relationships you are forming with youth to ensure you are “seeing the same picture” within your relationship (Search Institute, 2020).

CURRICULUM DETAILS



Competencies

Professional Research, Knowledge, Competencies (PRKC):
Youth Development Domain: Youth Development Theory

Volunteer Research, Knowledge, Competencies (VRKC):
Positive Youth Development Domain: Positive Youth Development
Overview and Practicing Youth-Adult Partnerships



Time Required

Approximately 1.5-2 hours

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this module, participants will be able to:

- 1 Explain the key elements that define developmental relationships.
- 2 Understand the essential and positive role those developmental relationships play in youth development.
- 3 Develop an individual plan to intentionally strengthen their relationships with youth, incorporating the five key elements of developmental relationships.
- 4 Identify cultural norms of individual youth that may require a different approach to creating positive developmental relationships.

Materials Needed

Copies for each participant:

1. DR In Your Development Tool (Appendix A)
2. The Developmental Relationships Framework (Appendix B)
3. Relationship Building Practice Tool (Appendix C)
4. 4-H Thriving Model Tip Sheet: Fostering Developmental Relationships (Appendix D)
5. Markers, flip chart paper/white boards if available.



Facilitator Tip

Think about how to distribute materials if lesson is delivered virtually.

Concepts and Vocabulary

- **5 Key Elements of Developmental Relationships:**
 - **Express Care:** demonstrate to individual youth that they matter to the adult.
 - **Challenge Growth:** encourage youth to learn, grow and get better through practice and effort, in supportive and helpful ways.
 - **Provide Support:** help youth complete tasks and achieve goals.
 - **Share Power:** treat youth with respect and ensure that they have a voice in things that affect them.
 - **Expand Possibilities:** connect youth to people, places and organizations that broaden their world.
- **4-H Thriving Model:** The 4-H Thriving Model predicts that youth who participate in 4-H programs that provide a high-quality developmental context will thrive, and thriving youth achieve key developmental outcomes.
- **Developmental Relationships:** secure attachments between youth and caring adults that are reflected in mutual warmth, respect, and trust.
- **Diversity:** includes our unique identities such as age, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, physical and mental ability, gender, sexual orientation, spiritual practices, employment status, geographic location, and other characteristics.
- **Equity:** means that everyone receives the unique resources and opportunities that they need to reduce or eliminate barriers to inclusion.
- **Inclusion:** is the act of creating spaces and places where each person has authentic value, respect, and support as part of the environment, group, and community.
- **Thriving:** a forward, purposeful motion towards achieving one's full potential.

Getting Ready

- Review background information and understand main lesson concepts.
- Review the full activity (Opening Questions; Procedure; Reflection; Term/Concept Discovery/Introduction; Application) and its flow.
- Make copies of handouts or distribute electronically in sequence.
- Establish small groups sizes based on number of anticipated participants.
- Adapt the lesson to virtual delivery as needed.

Facilitator Tip

Opening questions/prompts are key to beginning inquiry-based activities. To be effective, these questions/prompts need to be:

- *Open-ended and broad (no single "right" answer).*
- *Encourage learners to focus on their own thinking rather than trying to provide a "textbook definition" (e.g., Explain what you understand about....).*
- *Know your audience. Do you need to use different language (e.g., translated materials, different examples for understanding).*



ACTIVITY



Opening Questions/Prompts

The 4-H Thriving Model (Arnold, 2018) recognizes the developmental relationships as a key component that creates a developmental context, and when done well, help youth to thrive. Developmental relationships work in concert with the concepts of sparks and program quality.

Asking opening questions helps participants frame their thinking, as well as provides educators with some understanding of participants' prior knowledge and experience. Opening questions for this activity include:

- When we say "developmental relationships" describe what comes to your mind? Explain a meaning or quality you place on that word or description.
- Based on your understanding of this term, describe a positive developmental relationship you had as a child. Explain specific ways in which they helped you.

Facilitator Tip



Engage the participants! Consider forming small groups and ask them to record their thoughts on flip chart paper or a white board. Subsequently, ask them to share their responses with the larger group to help generate a discussion.

Alternatively, have a full group discussion and record answers to the questions/prompts on the flip chart paper or white board. Have participants compare similarities and differences among the responses. Breakout groups may take less or more time and may also be affected by venue (in-person or virtually). Build timing into your implementation plan!

Procedure

1. Distribute DR in Your Development Tool (Appendix A) to each participant.
2. Ask participants to complete the handout independently.
3. In small groups of 2-3 people, ask each participant to share answers to the 2 questions at the bottom of the handout: 1) Which person did you list in the largest number of categories? 2) Which person on your list was a bit of a surprise?
4. Working in the same small groups:
 - a. For each category and one at a time, ask the group to look at each of the bulleted "may have done this" examples on the worksheet.
 - b. Ask the groups to come up with an action/behavior for each statement. For example: In Category A: "Being someone you trust" could be demonstrated by what action/behavior?
 - c. When an action/behavior is identified for each statement, ask the groups to give broad titles/names—not more than 2 words—to each of the categories on the worksheet. For example: Category A: Show me that I matter to you, could be labeled what?



Facilitator Tip

Be aware that the first activity may elicit many different emotional responses. Individuals should have the opportunity to take a break or leave the room as needed.

Reflection

1. Ask each group to share out their labels for categories and actions/behaviors. Depending on the number of small groups, you may want to assign or ask groups to only share one category, giving each group a chance to contribute to the discussion.
2. Facilitate the discussion, add value, address any misunderstandings, and help participants make meaning that directs the conversation to the elements of Developmental Relationships as described by the Search Institute.



Facilitator Tip

There are many ways to accomplish reflection, but the key is to ensure all participants have the opportunity to share and learn from one another.

Concept/Term Discovery/Introduction

1. After the reflection discussion has concluded and not before, distribute or share electronically The Developmental Relationships Framework.
2. Facilitate a discussion. Ask the participants to explain what they notice about how the broad titles and actions/behaviors they came up with compare to these “elements”, “actions” and “definitions.”
3. Explain that developmental relationships as described by the Search Institute include these five elements, the related actions, and definitions. As we go forward in the 4-H Thriving Model, this is the language that we will use when we talk about developmental relationships.



Facilitator Tip

The goal is to have participants develop an understanding of the concepts through their exploration and define terms using their own words. If specific terms or concepts are not discovered by the learners on their own, or there are misunderstandings this is the time for the facilitator to help ensure clear understanding.

The following section of the activity can be very robust so be sure to provide adequate time for discussion and exchange of ideas. Participants may need support and ideas from others to complete page 6 of the Relationship Building Practices Tool. Participants may struggle to consider and think about adaptations that may be needed for youth from different cultures, learning abilities, etc.

Concept Application

Concept application is when learners apply their new knowledge and skills in authentic ways (e.g., service learning; community engagement), understanding is deepened and strengthened.

1. Distribute Relationship Building Practices Tool (6 pages) and the 4-H Thriving Model Tip Sheet: Fostering Developmental Relationships.
2. Ask the participants to analyze the actions within each element. Start with the items they are good at and identify items that they want to be more intentional about practicing with youth over the next two months. They should choose no more than 3 items in each category to work on.
3. Ask the participants to complete page 6. Identify individual youth that they work with who may need a different approach to the action(s) they are practicing over the next two months. Things that might require a different approach include cultural family norms for individual youth, learning challenges, social or emotional challenges, etc.

4. Encourage and challenge participants to continue to use this tool to build their skills and practice in developmental relationships.



Facilitator Tip

If you find that your learners struggle with page 6 of the Relationship Building Practices Tool, refer to resources available from the [National 4-H Council Equity Toolkit](#).

If participants need more time, this can be completed after the session and brought to the Community of Practice session.



Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

- JEAN LAVE AND ETIENNE WENGER

Community of Practice

This curriculum is designed to be used in conjunction with a community of practice of 4-H Youth Development practitioners. The term “community of practice” was coined in the 1990’s by cognitive anthropologists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger when studying apprenticeships as a learning model (Smith, 2009). The term referred to the community that acts as a living curriculum. Essentially a peer-to-peer professional-development activity organized by a leader, coordinator, or facilitator. Wenger used the following formula to explain key elements within a community of practice:

Competence + Experience + Engagement = a Community of Practice

Characteristics associated with a community of practice includes practitioners:

- Taking responsibility for the knowledge they need collectively
- Serving as the direct link between learning and intentionally implementing new knowledge and strategies
- Learning with and from each other
- Developing a shared repertoire of resources

INVITE TO COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE:

Invite participants to participate in a follow-up community of practice. The intention of the CoP will be to share our successes, get support from others and continue to develop actions and applications for practicing developmental relationships. Participants should complete “Relationship Building Practices” tool prior attendance at the follow up meeting.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE MEETING:

1. Ask participants to share what successes they had in practicing their identified elements.
2. Ask participants what challenges they had while working on their intentions.
3. Ask participants to discuss successes and challenges when they had to apply different approaches.



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COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE RESOURCES:

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The Developmental Relationships Framework and the conceptualization of Sparks as a feature of thriving were developed by Search Institute and are copyrighted by Search Institute. They are included within this curriculum as part of the 4-H Thriving model, and used with permission. These rights cannot be transferred to third parties or used in other contexts without the expressed permission of Search Institute. We are grateful for this collaboration with Search Institute and invite anyone who is interested in understanding and practicing developmental relationships further to explore additional training materials and opportunities available through Search Institute at: searchinstitute.org.

AUTHORS



The 4-H Thriving Model Curriculum consists of independent activity-based modules designed to introduce each concept of the 4-H Thriving Model using guided inquiry and experiential learning as the pedagogy. The purpose of this curriculum is to provide 4-H professionals and volunteers with an in-depth understanding of the concepts of the 4-H Thriving Model. We believe it is important for 4-H educators to understand the model well before they teach it to others. Inherent in all modules is a community of practice design that helps educators and volunteers reflect on their youth development practices as part of a learning community.

This curriculum was developed by the Program Leaders' Working Group (PLWG) Committee on Positive Youth Development.

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For more information please visit: 4-h.org



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