



## Youth Program Quality Principles

Dedicated volunteers and staff spend many hours working directly with youth in 4-H programs. From exploring topics in a Cloverbuds program, to learning science and technology skills by building a robot, to attending National 4-H Congress, 4-H provides many different types of programs to meet the needs of youth as they grow and develop. What happens in 4-H programs and how they are planned and led, makes a huge difference in the impact of the program on youth! In order to have the biggest impact, programs need to adhere to eight critical principles of program quality:

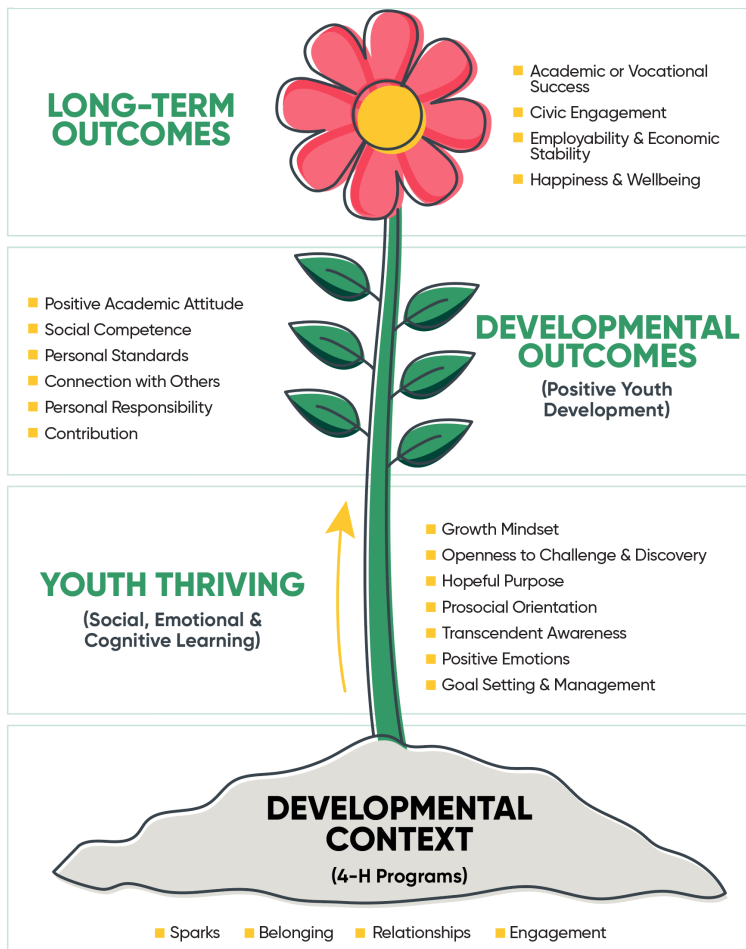
1. **Physical and psychological safety**- youth need to feel safe in 4-H programs and be able to interact positively with others.
2. **Appropriate structure** – whether it is a club meeting or leadership camp, 4-H programs must have clear and consistent rules and expectations, with clear boundaries and age-appropriate monitoring.
3. **Supportive relationships**- all youth need to feel warmth from and closeness to others in 4-H. Youth need to feel others care about and support them. They also need to receive clear guidance and communication from 4-H volunteers and staff.
4. **Opportunities to belong**- all youth need to feel included in a meaningful way in 4-H, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientations, or ability. Youth should have opportunities to share their culture and heritage with others and to forge a positive identity.
5. **Positive social norms** – Youth should experience clear rules and expectations for participating in 4-H, including the values, morals, and ethical expectations of being a 4-H member.
6. **Support for efficacy and mattering** – Youth in 4-H should be taken seriously and respected for their ideas and contributions. Youth should be given opportunities to develop responsibility and be challenged to set and achieve goals.
7. **Opportunities for skill building** – Youth need to develop physical, psychological, intellectual, emotional and social skills as they grow and develop. 4-H provides opportunities for youth to develop these skills, skills that support a young person into adulthood and the workplace.
8. **Integration of family, school and community** – Youth in 4-H do best when there is a connection to their 4-H experience with their family, school, and community. This is why 4-H programs begin at the local level, in the community where youth can practice their emerging leadership skills as they grow and develop.

*Research shows that youth development programs like 4-H must meet eight standards of quality in order to have a positive impact on youth.*

From Eccles, J., & Gootman, J. (Eds.). (2002). *Community programs to promote youth development*. Washington DC: National Academy Press.

## 4-H is Positive Youth Development

4-H is based on a positive youth development (PYD) approach that recognizes all youth have interests, abilities, and strengths that can be enhanced by participation in 4-H programs. Research shows that participation in high quality 4-H programs increases thriving in youth, and thriving youth achieve important developmental outcomes, such as academic motivation and achievement.



Learn more about the 4-H Thriving Model at:  
<https://helping-youth-thrive.extension.org/>

## References

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- Roth, J. L., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2003). What exactly is a youth development program? Answers from research and practice. *Applied Developmental Science*, 7, 94-111.

## Additional Resources

The Forum for Youth Investment - David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality: <https://forumfyi.org/work/the-weikart-center/>