Definition
An inclusive environment is one that creates a sense of belonging and encourages and supports its members with positive and specific feedback. Healthy groups celebrate the success of all members, taking pride in the collective efforts of all.

Application
An inclusive or welcoming environment goes a step beyond a safe environment. It is one where individuals feel included as a part of the group and feel supported and encouraged. The feeling of belonging to a group is very important to a young person. This is often why youth assume certain styles of dress and behave in certain ways. There are some very simple ways to create belonging from club or group membership cards to club or county t-shirts (adapted from Ferrari, 2003).

Introduction to the Session
One of the most pronounced developmental needs of adolescent youth is a sense of belonging or fitting in. As youth age, the influence of parents and other adults becomes less pronounced and the influence of peers increases. Status and peer influence often greatly affect how youth, especially adolescents, form their sense of “self” and react in different situations. It is important to remember that peers are not the only factors creating a sense of an inclusive or exclusive environment for youth. Adults can create an atmosphere that promotes inclusion or exclusion. This session explores how status, peer influences and environmental factors play out in a social setting and guide youth attitudes and interests.

This Element is present when:

• Youth members encourage each other during fair judging, at sports events, or through academic challenges.

• Members feel they belong to a specific club, or group while knowing that they also belong to larger state and national organizations and efforts.

• Signs, banners, t-shirts and other recognitions identify the youth’s clubs, organizations, and symbols.

• All members feel free to invite friends and welcome new members to events throughout the program year.

Ways to support this Element:

• Use buttons, t-shirts, hats or other symbols to signify group membership.

• Actively seek out others to diversify group membership.

• Provide many forms of recognition, not just to those who excel in competition with other youth. (See National 4-H Recognition Model, available from your county Extension office for framework and ideas)

• Involve everyone right from the beginning through ice-breakers and other get acquainted activities.

Goal of Lesson
To help adults working with youth recognize the importance of inclusive environments and the factors that create a sense of exclusion or inclusion among youth.
Objectives
The participants will:

- Recognize the effects that status and power have on youth attitudes and interest.
- Experience acceptance or rejection based on status, peer pressure and power.
- Examine strategies useful to the creation of inclusive environments.

Activities
Chain of Diversity
A Trip to the Mall

Materials Needed
- Several decks of playing cards
- Headbands to hold playing cards in place
- Copies of “A Letter to Me” or plain stationery
- Envelopes (one per participant)
- Glue sticks
- Six strips of colored construction paper per person. Strips should be about 1.25 to 1.5 inches wide and approximately 8 inches long.

Time to complete lesson: Approximately one hour

Introduction to Lesson
From the beginning of these sessions, what types of things did you see that were inclusive or exclusive in making all participants feel important and valued? (List them if applicable.)
Activity One: Chain of Diversity

Goal
Participants will discover and recognize the many ways in which they are similar and are different from others in the group as well as the ways in which each person is unique.

Do the Activity
1. This activity is a strong follow-up to an initial discussion about differences and similarities among people from different groups.
2. Introduce this activity by inviting participants to think about some of their own similarities and differences.
3. Pass bundles of colored strips of construction paper around the room.
4. Ask each participant to take six strips.
5. Ask participants to think of ways in which they are similar to and different from the other people in the room.
6. On each strip, participants should write down one similarity and one difference.
7. When completed, each person should have written six ways in which they are similar and six ways in which he or she is different from other people in the room.
8. Tell participants to be prepared to share what they have written on two of their strips with the whole group.
9. If group members are having difficulty, give some examples of ways that people may be different or similar, such as appearance, birth order, the type of community in which they live, hobbies and interests, age, parental status, or marital status.
10. Ask each person to share two ways he or she is the same and two ways he or she is different from the other people in the room.
11. Start a chain by overlapping and gluing together the ends of one strip.
12. Pass a glue stick to each person and ask the participants to add all six of their strips to the chain.
13. Continue around the room until all the participants have added their strips to the chain. After the discussion, display the Chain of Diversity on a bulletin board or around a doorway of the meeting room. The Chain of Diversity will symbolize the common aspects and the uniqueness that each person contributes to the group.

Ingram, P. (2008). Diversity Activities for Youth and Adults. Penn State Cooperative Extension, University Park, PA (used with permission).

Share
• Have participants share examples of what they wrote on their strips.

Process
• Ask participants to reflect on the many things they have in common, as well as the ways that each person in the group is unique.

Generalize
• Conclude by pointing out that, even though members of the group come from different backgrounds, in many ways they are the same.
• What types of words would participants in your 4-H program put on their strips?
• How would this be different from other groups they are a part of?

Apply
• How does it make you or other participants feel when you are more different than alike in that group?
Activity Two: Trip to the Mall

Obtain a deck of common playing cards and plan to use them all, depending on the size of your group. If you have a larger group, you may need more than one deck.

Do the Activity

1. Give each participant a headband to hold his/her card in place.

2. Ask participants to select a card from the deck (face down) and, without looking at the card, affix it to their forehead facing out. The headband holds the card.

3. Each number represents a particular status. Aces represent the highest, most esteemed youth, seen as leaders, who have plenty of available resources and whom all other youth respect and listen to. Others who also have face cards or high numbers are treated with a similar measure of respect and admiration. Those with low numbers are not to be trusted nor given much notice. Persons with numbers in between are neither the most important nor are they least important.

4. When each person has a card on his/her forehead, ask the group to begin the process of planning a field trip to a mall or other appropriate location.

5. They should interact with others playing the role that relates to the number on their card.

6. After a few minutes, when the group clearly has a sense of who they are, ask them to line themselves up according to what number they think they are, from lowest to highest.

7. When all participants are in a line, ask them to look at their numbers. Then, ask them to return to their seats.

Share

- How did you do?
- Were you right in guessing what kind of card you had?
- For those in the low numbers, how did you feel?
- How did those with aces or face cards feel?
- And how about those of you with numbers in the mid-range?

Process

- For those who had the low numbers, how were you able to participate?
- What was your interest in completing the assignment? What did you think about the people with the higher numbers?
- For the middle numbers, how were you able to participate in the process? What was your interest in completing the project?
- What did you think about the numbers higher than yours?
- What did you think about those with lower numbers?
- For higher numbers (face cards and aces), how were you able to participate in the planning process?
- What was your interest in completing the task?
- How did you feel about the input and suggestions of those with lower numbers?
- What did you think about those with numbers lower than yours?

Generalize

- How would this apply to other status symbols and classifications or groups youths might find themselves in?
- What are some examples of status and classifications in 4-H groups?

(Possible answers: parents were 4-H’ers and know the unwritten rules: only the expensive animals have a chance to win big prizes; required dress for contests is expensive; boards, councils
and committees have no term limits or interest in attracting new people with different ideas; participation requirements fit only a two-parent, single-income family)

Apply
- How could the status of youth become more equalized in a 4-H setting?
  (Possible answers: leadership roles are rotated or have term limits, member orientation or assigned mentors guide new participants, all members are encouraged to have a “voice” in decisions made)
- What could you do as an adult to encourage others to help create a more inclusive environment?
  (Possible answers: examine your attitudes and actions to see if they favor one child or group, be more tolerant of diverse family structures and needs, check to see if expectations are too limiting for success)

(Optional Activity)

Remember Me

1. Present each participant with a copy of “A Letter to Me” and an envelope.
2. Ask each participant to write a letter to him/herself with 10 intentional ways to include all youth and adults in their program.
3. Have participants seal the envelope and address it to their home.

Note to presenter: To remind participants of their commitment, collect the letters and send them to participants several weeks after the session is over.

Customer Survey
Use the Target evaluation and/or the retrospective evaluation provided to evaluate this session.

Essential Elements Program Checklist
Evaluate your program for evidence of the essential elements of successful, positive youth development programs by referring to the Essential Elements Program Checklist in the Appendix on p.103. Explore additional strategies for deliberate and intentional ways to incorporate the essential elements in the Web Appendix at: www.4-h.org/resources/essentialelements.
Digging Deeper

Learning about Disabilities
Adjusting your program to meet special needs of youth is often a challenge for those having limited experience with diverse audiences. A great resource for creating inclusive environments can be found at the following web site: University of Wyoming “Inclusive 4-H” Fact Sheet, http://4-h.uwyo.edu

Learning about Youth with Autism

Discovering “Where I Fit In” Is Important to Adolescent Development
It may seem that teens change their clothing styles, music preferences, peer groups and career interests as frequently as the weather changes. The physical, social, cognitive and emotional changes that come with adolescence are part of the task of forming an identity. Teens determine who they are and who they may be by affiliating with peers and groups. Adolescents know which groups they feel comfortable with, which peers they’re accepted by, and whom they choose to not affiliate with. Good leaders intentionally create an inclusive environment where youth have opportunities to try out different roles and responsibilities. An inclusive environment also provides social and emotional “space” so youth can be about the business of determining their current and future identity.

Learn more about Erikson and Marcia’s work in Identity Formation in the Web Appendix at www.4-h.org/resources/essentialelements.

References
Dear _______________________________,

Today I learned how status and influence among a group’s membership can have negative consequences for some individuals. As an advocate for the youth with whom we work, I want to always remember to be aware of the welcoming and inclusive climate within my youth group. Here are ten ways in which I can positively include all youth and adults in our program.

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Respectfully,

_______________________________
(Sign name above)
### About Your TRAINING Experiences . . .

We are interested in how you view your experiences with the Training on Essential Elements- Key Ingredients. Please circle the answer that best describes how much you agree with the following statements both AFTER and BEFORE the training.

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<th>AFTER THE TRAINING</th>
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<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
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<td>I can list behaviors or practices that lead to an inclusive environment.</td>
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<td>I can list behaviors or practices that hinder an inclusive environment.</td>
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<td>I can describe the effects of power, status, and peer influence on youth.</td>
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<td>I understand the potential consequences of acceptance or rejection.</td>
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<td>I can demonstrate program practices and behaviors that create an inclusive environment.</td>
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<td>I am likely to use inclusive practices in my programs.</td>
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<td>I can distinguish between an inclusive and exclusive environment.</td>
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<td>I can examine my program and incorporate activities that create an inclusive environment.</td>
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