



Essential Elements of the 4-H Experience

A **Caring Adult** is actively involved as an advisor, guide, coach and mentor. He or she helps set boundaries and expectations for young people and could also be described as a supporter, friend and advocate.

Look for:

- 4-H leaders who address members by first names,
- Know the interests of individual members, and
- Pay attention to their other activities including those outside of 4-H.

A **Safe Environment** exists when youth do not fear physical or emotional harm while participating in the 4-H experience—from the environment itself, adults, other participants, or spectators. For training on risk management in insure safe environments, go to <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/4h/page/4-h-risk-management>

Look for:

- Club groups that do not tolerate bullying, cliques or put downs.
- Children younger than 4th grade are not allowed to show livestock other than a bottle/bucket animal.
- Child Protection & Safety Policies and procedures in place
- Leaders plan safety aspects into meetings, camps, trips, etc.

An **Inclusive Setting** fosters a sense of belonging in all members. It encourages and supports the members and offers encouragement with positive and specific feedback. Healthy groups celebrate the success of all members taking pride in the collective efforts of all.

Look for:

- Club members encouraging each other during fair judging.
- Members feel that they belong to a specific club as well as a county and state organization.
- Club signs, banners and t-shirts identifying their clubs and state with the 4-H Clover emblem.
- Members inviting and welcoming new members.

Opportunities for:

Mastery includes building knowledge, skills, wisdom and attitudes, and then demonstrating their use. The level of mastery depends on the ability or interests of the individual youth. It is a process that evolves, sometimes over a period of years, and is not a one-time experience. This element supports the 4-H concept of hands-on learning.

Look for:

- Members growing in projects that capture their interest.
- Eventually, they may assist or mentor other members in this area.
- An exhibit or presentation to demonstrate what they have learned.

Service to others has been a part of the 4-H experience for over a century. Its premise is that finding yourself often begins with giving service to others. Service is a way for members to gain exposure and contribute to the larger community and the world itself. For training on community service learning, go to <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/4h/page/service-learning>

Look for:

- Community service projects—individually, as a club, or with other community groups.
- Service can also be within the club, as older members assist and mentor younger members.

Self Determination is believing that you have impact over life’s events rather than passively submitting to the whims of others. It is learning about yourself, your talents and interests. Young people must develop a sense of influence over their choices as well as the consequences of those choices. Then, they can become self-directing, independent adults.

Look for:

- Club members choosing projects, exhibits, or to serve as club officers.
- Self-evaluation includes questions such as “what went well, what will you do differently next time, etc.”
- Members choosing and planning club activities.

Planning for the Future is crucial to the development of young people. A view of a positive future has hope and optimism to shape life choices and to facilitate the transition into active participation in future events.

Look for:

- Club members drawing on their various project interests to help choose possible career paths.
- Members looking forward to being on county council.
- Officers planning the upcoming year.
- The club sharing excitement about a future activity.

Engaged Learning is essential in learning and life. An engaged youth is interested in the subject and the people in the group, developing an understanding of both the subject and him/herself. By learning through experience, the engaged learner has a higher degree of self-motivation and an inexhaustible capacity to create.

Look for:

- Members of various ages doing a community service project.
- Members working together, planning activities and laughing while they are involved in recreation.
- Watching members grow and mature as they plan and lead club activities and events, and go from first year members to officers.

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