



Meeting the Needs of Youth: Tips for 4-H Leaders

4-H leaders can support the positive and successful development of all youth. Youth Development research emphasizes the importance of meeting four basic human needs: belonging, mastery, independence and generosity. It's clear that youth whose needs are met in positive ways are likely to grow into good citizens and contributing members of their families and communities.

4 Needs of Youth

1. Need to Belong

Youth need to know they are cared about by others and feel a sense of connection to others in the group. 4-H gives youth the opportunity to feel physically and emotionally safe while actively participating in a group. This represents the **HEART** of 4-H. Here's how you can help.

- Help group members to get to know each other through introductions, group games, mixers, and small group activities.
- Create opportunities for members to interact with each other through their 4-H project work and group tasks.
- Develop traditions to welcome new members and celebrate individuals.
- Find ways to involve family and community members in as many activities as possible.

2. The Need to Master

Youth need to feel and believe they are capable and experience success at solving problems and meeting challenges to develop their self-confidence. By exploring 4-H projects and activities, youth master skills to make positive career and life choices. This represents the **HEALTH** of 4-H. Here's how you can help.

- Help youth find resources to explore their 4-H projects and activities.
- Provide project learning experiences.
- Model and teach that failure or frustration is not a disgrace but a part of the learning experience.
- Be fair and consistent when enforcing rules and giving feedback.

3. The Need to be Independent

Youth need to know that they are able to influence people and events through decision-making and action. By exercising independence through 4-H leadership opportunities, youth mature in self-discipline and responsibility and learn to better understand themselves. This represents the **HEAD** of 4-H. Here's how you can help:

- Give youth opportunities to lead simple tasks and then progress to more difficult ones.
- Recruit, train and support young people who are ready for more responsibility.
- Avoid jumping in to help unless you are really needed, encourage young people to overcome obstacles on their own.
- Encourage, motivate and praise members who complete leadership roles.

4. The Need to Be Generous

Youth need to feel their lives have meaning and purpose. By exploring 4-H community service and citizenship activities, youth can connect to communities and learn to give back to others. This represents the **HANDS** of 4-H. Here's how you can help.

- Have your group adopt a specific service project that fits their interests and abilities and meets a community need
- Arrange tours of local sites and opportunities to get involved.
- Encourage youth to consider the feelings of others.
- Set up mentoring opportunities where youth learn from others.

The 4-H Environment

4-H is designed to support the positive and successful development of all youth. 4-H leaders are essential partners in creating a positive environment by focusing on the strengths of youth and providing positive ways for youth to meet their four basic needs

1. Caring Relationships (Belonging)

All youth need a caring, supportive relationship in their lives. You can be that someone by showing interest in, actively listening to, and fostering the gifts of 4-H youth

2. Constructive learning Experiences (Mastery)

Youth rely on the joy they receive from interests, hobbies and group participating to balance disappointments in other parts of their lives (Werner and Smith, 1992). 4-H offers opportunities to take on new challenges and learn new skills. Help youth complete the Experiential Learning Process by experiencing, sharing what happened, processing what was important, generalizing the experience to the real world and applying what was learned in another situation.

3. Leadership Opportunities (Independence)

Creating opportunities for youth to develop skills and confidence for leadership and self-discipline is a cornerstone of 4-H. Help young people recognize the connection between independence and responsibility. Independence does mean greater power and influence but it is linked with responsibility for decisions made and actions taken.

4. Service to Communities (Generosity)

The 4-H Pledge focuses on the importance of larger service and recognizing a responsibility for the welfare of others. Help young people focus on developing concern for others and taking action to demonstrate that concern. Service forges bonds between youth and the community, and doing something valued by others raises feelings of self-worth and competence.

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