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Youth Learning Characteristics

The 9–11 year olds

Active is the word for this group! Activities should encourage physical involvement because 9–11 year-old boys and girls are anything but still and quiet.

Hands-on involvement with objects is helpful. Children this age are still fairly concrete thinkers and will give adults more attention if they are both seeing and doing things. They also need many opportunities to share their thoughts and reactions to others.

Children at this stage are beginning to think logically and symbolically and are beginning to understand abstract ideas. As they consider an idea, they think it is right or wrong, great or disgusting, fun or boring. There is very little middle ground.

The role of the helper is crucial at this stage. These children look to adults for approval and follow rules primarily out of respect for adults. Individual evaluation by adults is preferred over group competition, where only one can be the best. Comparison with the success of others is difficult for these children. It erodes self-confidence. Instead of comparing children with each other, build positive self-concepts by comparing present to past performances for the individual.

This is also the age of the “**joiners.**” Boys and girls like to be in organized groups of others similar to themselves. They generally are concerned with immediate self reward. The satisfaction of completing a project often comes from pleasing the volunteer or parent rather than from the value of the activity itself. Often participation in community service projects are enjoyed because youth can see they are making a difference in another’s life.

These youngsters have a strong need to feel accepted and worthwhile. School and other pressures are demanding. Individual improvement should continue to be emphasized. Youngsters want to know how much they have improved and what they should do to be better next time. Individual evaluation and encouragement from an adult can have amazing results.

The 12–14 year olds

This developmental stage varies widely among young teens. **Growth spurts** beginning with adolescence occur at a wide range of ages, with girls usually maturing before boys. These rapid changes in physical appearance may make some teens uncomfortable. Faster-developing teens may feel thrust into a more adult world they didn’t choose. Slower-developing teens may be uneasy about their lack of changes.

Young teens move from concrete to more **abstract thinking**. Playing with ideas is as much fun as playing sports. Ready-made solutions from adults are often rejected by young teens in favor of **finding their own solutions**. Volunteers who provide supervision, support and minimal direction will do well with this group.

Small groups provide the best opportunity for young teens to **test ideas**. Justice and equality become important issues. Opinions of peers become more important than opinions of parents and other adults. Teens enjoy the social interaction and acceptance they receive in **groups**.

As puberty approaches, young teens begin a roller coaster ride of hormones and emotions. This time period seems to present the biggest challenge to a young person’s self-concept. These youngsters face so many changes that they hardly know who they are. Young teens begin to test values and seek adults who are accepting and willing to talk about values and morals. Adults can help by providing self-discovery activities leading teens to self-knowledge.

Continue to avoid comparing young people with each other and try not to embarrass them. They want to be part of something important and have opportunities to **develop responsibility and demonstrate leadership skills**.

The 15–18 year olds

Most teens of this age recognize their own special abilities and talents. In most cases, they have adjusted to the many post-puberty changes. By now teens tend to be wrapped up in themselves and their peer group rather than family, teachers and other adults. Relationship skills are usually more developed and dating increases. Acceptance by members of the opposite sex is of higher importance.

Mid-teens begin to think about their future and realistic plans. Their **vocational goals** influence the activities that they select. Teens set goals based on their personal needs and priorities. Any goals set by others are generally rejected. As they master abstract thinking, they can imagine new things in ways that sometimes challenge adults.

Older teens can generally initiate and carry out their own tasks **without supervision**. They can help younger members plan and complete their projects. They should be encouraged to take on this leadership role. An adult volunteer can be helpful by arranging new experiences in areas of interest to teens, but must be sure to allow for plenty of input from the youth. The volunteer should play the role of advisor/coach for independent workers.



Developing Life Skills

Life skills are defined in the Targeting Life Skills (TLS) Model (Hendricks, 1996) as “Skills that help an individual to be successful in living a productive and satisfying life.” As a volunteer working with youth in this project, you have many opportunities to assist youth in developing life skills as they acquire project-related skills and knowledge.

TLS Model

The TLS Model identifies and divides the major life skills targeted by 4-H youth development by the four H's from the 4-H Clover that represent Head, Heart, Hands and Health. These four are further divided in categories of life skills and then into specific life skills as shown here. The TLS Model handbook further divides each general life skill into separate learning opportunities to develop the skill.

Experiential Model

As you capitalize on the youth's interest in this project, your challenge is to provide age-appropriate opportunities for youth to experience and practice these skills until they are able to be used everyday. By using the experiential learning process to help youth fully internalize both the poultry content and the life skill, they gain the ability to apply both types of skills appropriately.

Show of Success Indicator

Each activity in this series shows both the project skill and life skills youth will practice and develop. A well-designed activity will involve the youth in the practice of several life skills. In one activity youth may practice decision making, communicating and goal setting. Only one is targeted for each activity so you can specifically discuss it with the youth when the activity is completed. “Show of Success” states what the youth would do to achieve the learner outcome for the activity. This indicator usually includes both the life skill and project skill. This is the goal for youth to achieve and for you to support their efforts to achieve.

Helping youth develop and understand important life skills while learning about their project is a challenge. However, the youth will appreciate your extra effort now and in the future when they look back on these experiences.

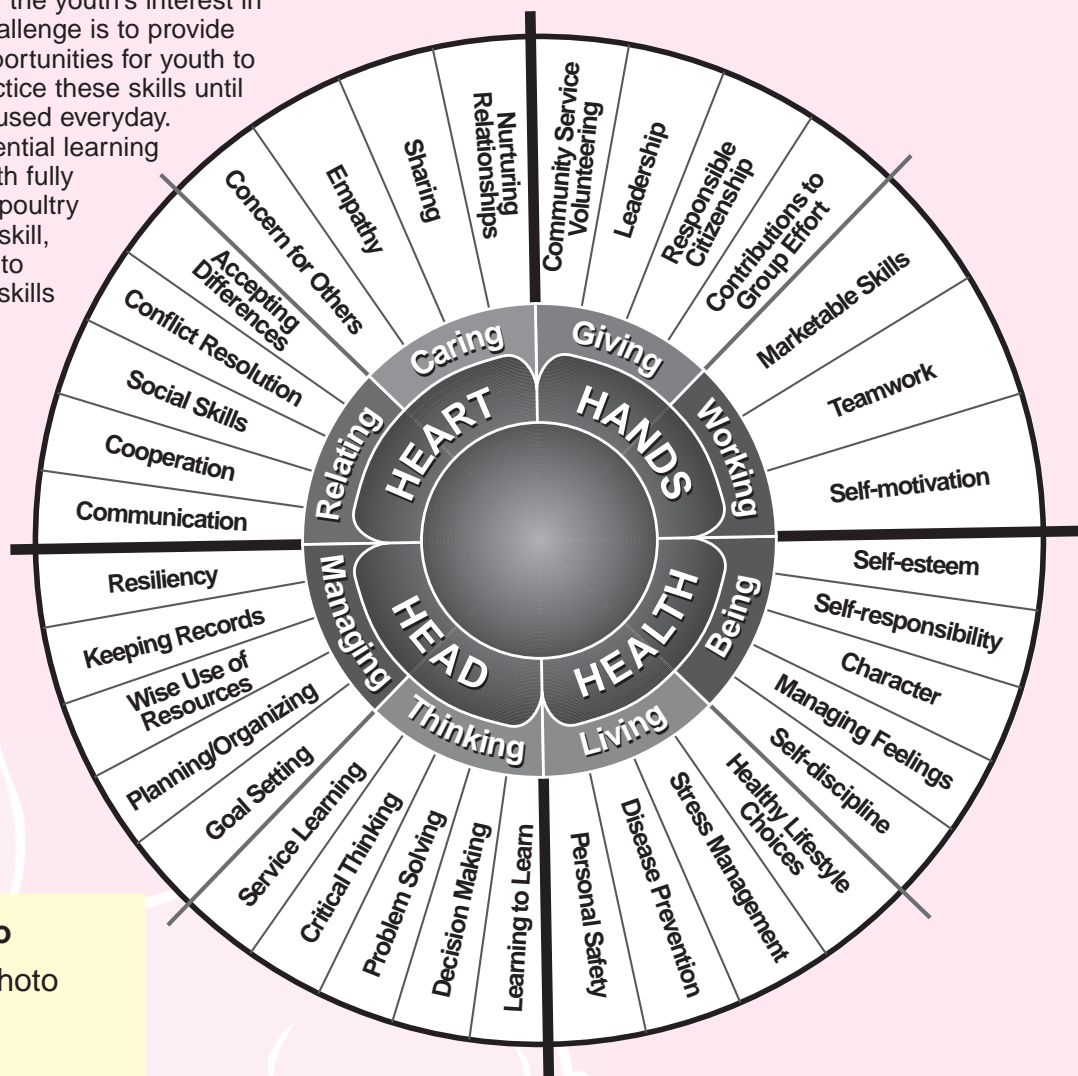


Photo
Rabbit Photo



Teaching and Learning Experientially

The 4-H Youth Development Program has promoted the five steps of the experiential learning model as an essential part of all educational experiences. You'll notice that each of the activities in this series, as well as those in all other curriculum products that have qualified for the National 4-H Collection, use this model.

There are several reasons the five specific and sequential steps of the model work well when the objective is to combine the development of project subject matter and personal life skills in a single activity or series of related activities. The experiential learning process engages the learners in the activity, encourages them to think more, work harder and ultimately learn more thoroughly than with traditional teaching methods such as telling or showing.



"Experiential learning takes place when a person is involved in an activity, looks back and evaluates it, determines what was useful or important to remember and uses this information to perform another activity."

John Dewey

1. Experience

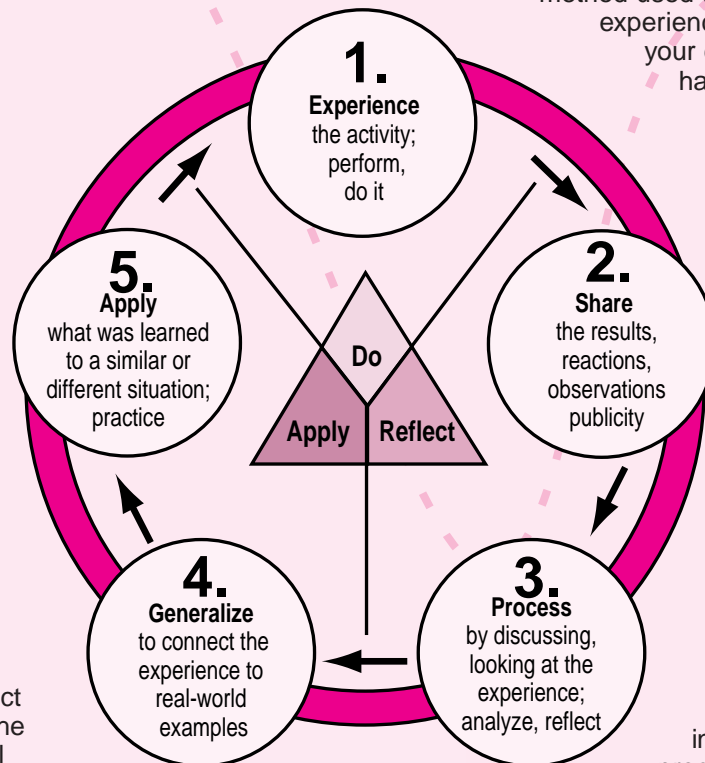
Note the model begins with an experience. Action! This immediately focuses the attention on the learner rather than the teacher. When the learner is encouraged to learn by doing before being told or shown how, opportunities are presented for a wide variety of life skills to be practiced depending on the method used to engage the youth in the experience. As the group leader your challenge is to "sit on your hands" as much as possible during the experience step. You and the youth involved will quickly learn what the skill or knowledge level is. Many times you will hear "We figured this out all by ourselves!"

5. Apply

What was really learned and can the youth express how they can use what they learned? Or better yet, can they actually show that they have mastered a skill by performing another activity that requires the new skill? Again the emphasis is placed on the life skill practiced rather than the subject matter skill.

4. Generalize

In this step the discussion becomes more personal. So what? is the question. What did the experience mean to me personally? To my everyday life? The subject matter alone could remain the focus of the discussion in all five steps of the model. However, because the major outcome is to help youth develop important life skills, a major part of the discussion is shifted to the life skill the youth practiced while doing the activity or experience. If the method employed required the youth to work in teams to complete the activity, then questions about teamwork would be appropriate. If the methodology asks the youth to communicate, then communications skills are discussed.



2. Share

As the model shows, sharing is simply asking the group or individuals: What did you do? What happened? What did it feel like to do (whatever)? This step should generate lots of information to lead to the process step.

3. Process

The questions and discussion now become more focused on what was most important about the experience. Common themes that emerge from the sharing session are explored further. Often the key teaching points related to the subject matter are discussed.