



Understanding Youth

To help youth become useful and responsible citizens, you must understand their needs and interests. All youth have needs, desires, interests, values, strengths and weaknesses that affect their behavior. Although they have different personalities, they are alike in many ways. They all share certain fundamental needs:

Basic needs of youth

• Youth need to belong

Youth need to feel accepted, not only by other members, but also by the leader. Accept all members as they are and guide them in the best direction. See that each member gains a place of importance in and with a group and has a feeling of belonging. Youth are more likely to continue participating in a group as long as they have friends in it and feel accepted.

• Youth want to develop useful skills

Youth need and want to develop skills. They need opportunities to learn how to do things well. Most of all, they want to develop the skills necessary to get along with others. It is very important for youth to feel comfortable in a group.

• Youth need recognition

This is an important need in a youngster's life. A spoken "well done" is often sufficient reward. Youth need a great deal of encouragement if they are to maintain their interests. Every youth has an innate desire to serve others and should be given opportunities to provide community service that they believe is valuable.

• Youth need responsibilities in proportion to their age

The level of responsibility given to youth depends on their age and experience. The younger members do well if they learn to be responsible for their project and participate in their club meetings.

Adolescents need and like freedom of choice. They like to make decisions, not only for themselves, but also for the group. With the older adolescents, the leader should act as an advisor, allowing members to assume the major responsibility under his guidance. Leadership jobs offer them opportunities for growth and development.



• Youth need to feel valued

This is as essential to personality development as is milk to the growing infant. Youth need to know that they are wanted and valued in spite of their shortcomings.

In personality development, the adult volunteer must function for the group as a whole and for the individual. Balance is the key word. Youth growing in a balanced way are happy and comfortable. Volunteers must have a great interest in the individual and have keen insight into and understanding of youth's problems.

Suggestions for leaders

Developmental stages of 4-H age youth have been divided into three age groups: 9 to 11, 12 to 14 and 15-19. The suggestions given for each of these groups below are to help volunteers work more effectively with youth:

Ages 9 to 11

Physical development

- Provide active tasks. These are important to the physical development of this age group.
- Design individual and group activities. Select activities that develop an understanding and appreciation of a growing and changing body.

Mental development

- Plan meetings with a maximum of 30 minutes of mental activities, and provide variety.
- Identify short-term projects that can be accomplished in about six to eight meetings.
- To satisfy their curiosity, explain the "whys" of projects or activities as well as the "hows."
- Promote independence and individuality by planning activities that permit youth to work independently of parents and other adults.
- Provide questions that will lead to self-evaluation.
- Suggest reading materials at fourth-, fifth- and sixth-grade levels to encourage continued development of reading skills.

Social development

- Design project and group activities that develop peer-group participation and relationships.
- Note that small groups of 10 to 12 youth of the same sex are usually best with this age group.
- Suggest choices for social activities that require group decision making.
- Plan programs that include parents, leaders and youth in open interaction.

Emotional development

- To insure success and enhance feelings of competence, confidence and self-esteem, provide projects and activities that are within the capabilities of the members.
- Promote competitive events with clear rules and regulations. Avoid rigorous competition.
- Plan projects and group activities in which all members can participate and feel accepted.
- Provide opportunities for "safe" decision making, that is, where the consequences of errors in judgment or reasoning are neither serious nor cause for embarrassment.

Vocational/career development

- Provide a variety of activities that help youth explore their abilities and talents.
- Suggest work-place visits that are related to the project. Allow participants to see what workers do.
- List careers related to the project or activity and suggest ways they can be explored.

Ages 12-14

Physical development

- Plan competitive activities that do not pit boys against girls. At this age girls are more physically mature than are boys.
- Projects should be action-oriented.
- Identify project activities that develop skill coordination and enhance the individual's understanding and appreciation of a growing and changing body. Avoid physical activities that emphasize awkwardness.

- Design health and grooming activities that help youth develop poise, self-confidence and self-esteem.

Mental development

- Provide more opportunities for 4-H members to determine and set their own goals.
- Provide support when youth need it and request it.
- To develop problem-solving abilities, offer experiences involving complex ideas and relationships.

Social development

- Plan projects so that participants can decide whether or not those activities should be coeducational. Note that boys and girls may differ sharply in social development and their desire to be involved in coeducational activities.
- Provide opportunities and ideas for group and/or self-determined projects.
- Suggest opportunities and activities for democratic group decision making.
- Plan social experiences that enhance self-confidence in peer group relationships.

Emotional development

- To continue building self-concept, suggest project activities that ensure an adequate level of success.
- Prepare opportunities that permit youth to discuss the physical development of their bodies as a natural and normal process.
- Provide opportunities for discussion of human sexuality to ease anxiety associated with a developing body and self-image.

Vocational/career development

- Suggest ways to explore project areas based on personal interests.
- Provide opportunities to discuss the personal meaning of work.
- Identify the potential for part-time jobs associated with the project.

Ages 15 to 19

Physical development

- Suggest varied physical activities to meet diverse interest and maturity levels.
- Design activities that strengthen male and female roles.
- Focus some activities on the physical self to help youth accept who they are.

Mental development

- Allow youth to set their own goals, make their own plans, implement those plans and evaluate their results.
- Promote opportunities for youth to discuss topics they like and encourage them to express their values.
- To develop creativity and gain new experiences, suggest opportunities to try something new, different and unknown.

Social development

- Develop opportunities for youth to perform adult social roles and functions in community agencies and institutions.
- To enhance family communication, provide opportunities for youth and parental interaction.
- Use projects that teach cooperation and principles of equality.
- Recommend roles for junior or teen leaders.
- Provide opportunities to assume roles in areas such as music, drama, leadership and citizenship.

Emotional development

- Suggest ideas that develop the acceptance of body and appearance through clothing and grooming.
- Provide opportunities for success that will help youth overcome feelings of inadequacy and inferiority.
- Promote group discussions that address issues of concern to youth.

Vocational/career development

- Plan tours to visit work locations to see what workers do.
- Design activities where youth can examine their interests, abilities, values and needs, and relate them to occupational opportunities.
- Suggest part-time jobs to promote self-sufficiency in youth.
- Suggest visits to colleges, universities and technical schools to explore opportunities to prepare for various occupations.

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