



# The Learning Environment

4-H participation influences the way young people think, act and feel. Youth participate in 4-H activities when they are fun and interesting.

As a 4-H volunteer, you have tremendous influence in determining the learning that takes place within your 4-H club or group. Adult volunteers also have the task of making the learning experiences attractive to youth. Here are some important learning principles to use in working with 4-H youth.

## Principles of learning

- Learning occurs best in an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance.
- Youth must have their project or activity goals clearly in mind.
- The ability to learn varies with each youth.
- For adequate learning to occur, motivation is necessary.
- Young people must participate in selecting their learning activities.
- The most meaningful evaluation is self-evaluation.
- Complex tasks are done in steps, from the most basic to the complex.
- Use of multiple learning strategies enhances learning - auditory, visual, tactile, kinesthetic.

When you incorporate these principles into your 4-H program you will be "creating a positive learning environment." The central job for an adult volunteer is to help the youth member learn. Youth learn best by:

- **Doing:** Actual experience (4-H Projects), working with models, judging, dramatic participation, discussions, field trips, tours and demonstrations.
- **Seeing:** Exhibits, pictures, maps, movies, slides, filmstrips, posters and graphs.
- **Listening:** Radio, recordings, illustrated talks, and lectures.



Although successful volunteers use a variety of learning experiences for their club, they select as many as possible from the "doing" category. The question for the leader is then: How can I present the information so that youth become interested and take action rather than just listen? To improve the likelihood that the members will understand and apply an idea, follow these steps:

### **1. Getting the learner's attention.**

Club members are seldom aware of the range of things they will learn in their projects. Leaders need to direct participants toward new project-related ideas and experiences.

### **2. Stimulate the learner's interest.**

Once attention has been captured, the leader may appeal to the members' basic needs and interests to encourage them to consider the idea. Step by step, the leader explains to the group how the new idea, skill or activity will benefit them.

Present one idea at a time. Make the presentation short, attractive, and understandable.

### **3. Arousing the member's desire for information.**

The leader must stimulate the members' interest until they personally decide to participate in the learning experience. The role of the leader is to help youth perceive the usefulness of the information and experiences given to them as well as in how the activity might fulfill personal needs or interests.

### **4. Convincing the members to act.**

The learner must understand what is involved in the project or activity as well as how it applies to him or her personally. The leader makes sure that the experience is fun and easy to carry out. Leaders should remove all barriers that keep youth from acting and helping others.

### **5. Promote evaluation and satisfaction.**

Leaders help members evaluate what they have accomplished. Leaders should encourage youth to share their successes among themselves and express their admiration when appropriate.

Leaders can teach youth many things they may not know they need to learn. In your work with youth, study the teaching steps mentioned above and think creatively about what you will present and teach.

Reference: This publication is an edited and updated version of the "Texas 4-H Leaders Handbook."

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