



Experiential Learning Model

4-H Youth Development Programs use an Experiential Learning Model. Our motto is “Learning by Doing” and it best explains what Experiential Learning is! All 4-H curriculum follows this model and it is important for 4-H volunteers to understand why it is so important.

There are five steps to the Experiential Learning Model - Experience, Share, Process, Generalize and Apply. This process engages the learners in the activity, encouraging them to think more, work harder and ultimately learn more thoroughly than with traditional teaching methods.

Experience

The model begins with an experience or activity. This gives the youth something fun to do and immediately focuses the attention on the learner rather than the teacher. When the learner is encouraged to learn by doing before 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 a volunteer, 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.

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.

Process

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

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 on the life skill the youth practiced while doing the activity. 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.

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 to be used? This is often “practiced” by youth creating a concrete project to exhibit somewhere - with their 4-H group, at school or at a fair. However the emphasis should still be placed on the life skill practiced rather than the subject matter skill.

