



What is Positive Youth Development?

(Excerpts from 4-H Youth Development Facts in Brief – USDA)

Youth development is the natural process of developing one's capacities. While it occurs through youth's daily experiences with people, places and possibilities, it is far too important to be left to chance.

Positive youth development occurs from an intentional process that promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, choices, relationships, and the support necessary for youth to fully participate. Youth development takes place in families, peer groups, schools, neighborhoods and communities.

4-H youth development programs provide just such opportunities, relationships, and support for youth to help them acquire the life skills necessary to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood. 4-H uses experiential, research-based educational opportunities that help youth become competent, caring, confident, connected, and contributing citizens of character. These experiences immediately yield new knowledge, which leads to changed behavior, and through prolonged participation, gradually promotes attitudes, characterizations and outcomes of:

- **Competence** – advanced skills in some important subjects of interest.
- **Character** – clear consistent moral precepts that effectively guide behavior.
- **Caring** – willingness to respond to the needs and concerns of others.
- **Confidence** – willingness to take on new challenges, and expect success.
- **Connections** – establishing and maintaining relationships at many levels.
- **Contributions** – making a difference in the lives of others through service.

The 2001 National 4-H Impact Assessment demonstrated that eight critical needs of youth are consistently met in 4-H youth development programs. The importance of these critical elements has been verified most recently by the survey of existing research included in the *2002 Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*:

- Positive relationships with caring adults, good emotional and moral support;
- Feeling emotionally and physically safe;
- Structure and limits that are developmentally appropriate and that recognize adolescents' increasing social maturity and expertise;
- Feeling a sense of belonging, in an inclusive environment;
- Exposure to positive morals, values, and positive social norms;
- Opportunities for skill building and mastery, including learning how to form close, durable human relations with peers that support and reinforce healthy behaviors, as well as to acquire the life skills necessary for school success and successful transition in to adulthood;
- Opportunities to value and practice service to others, to do things that make a real difference and to play an active role in the organizations themselves;
- Opportunities for self-determination, and engagement in learning; and
- Opportunities to see oneself as an active participant in the future.

When these conditions are in place in a good 4-H youth development program, participating youth are highly likely to demonstrate the six C's cited above.