



Helping You Help Youth



ENHANCE THEIR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Why is Social and Emotional Development Important?

“Skills for Living” has always been the mission of 4-H. The 4-H Targeting Life Skills Model depicts some of the important skills that youth develop in 4-H (see Figure 1). A closer look at the model shows that many of the skills are actually social and emotional skills. When youth are socially and emotionally competent, they are able to:

- Recognize and manage emotions
- Express care and concern for others
- Make responsible decisions
- Behave ethically and responsibly
- Develop positive relationships
- Avoid risky behaviors
- Communicate effectively
- Set and reach goals
- Be self-motivated and self-directed

A growing body of research has confirmed that **social and emotional skills are key to youth’s success in school, work, and life.** This fact sheet

will help 4-H volunteers understand the importance of these skills and learn specific ways to develop social and emotional skills in youth through 4-H programming.

What is Social and Emotional Learning?

Social and emotional development (SED) refers to the lifelong process of refining one’s social and emotional skills. The term social and emotional learning (SEL) is used by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) to describe both core competencies and a process of learning.

The core SEL competencies that were integrated into the Illinois State Learning Standards in December 2004 include: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making skills. Within each of these competencies are numerous other skills,

like those identified in the sidebar: Defining the Core SEL Skills and highlighted in the SEL life skills model shown in Figure 2.

The process of SEL refers to the creation of a safe, caring and highly participatory learning environment where SEL competencies are modeled, taught and learned. As confirmed in research on positive youth development (PYD), 4-H provides excellent learning environments for youth to develop essential life skills including social and emotional skills.

Defining the Core SEL Skills

Self-Awareness: Recognizing one’s emotions, thoughts, values, strengths and limitations

Self-Management: Managing one’s emotions, thoughts and actions

Social Awareness: Showing empathy for others, perspective taking, reading others’ body language and emotions, recognizing how others are affected by one’s actions

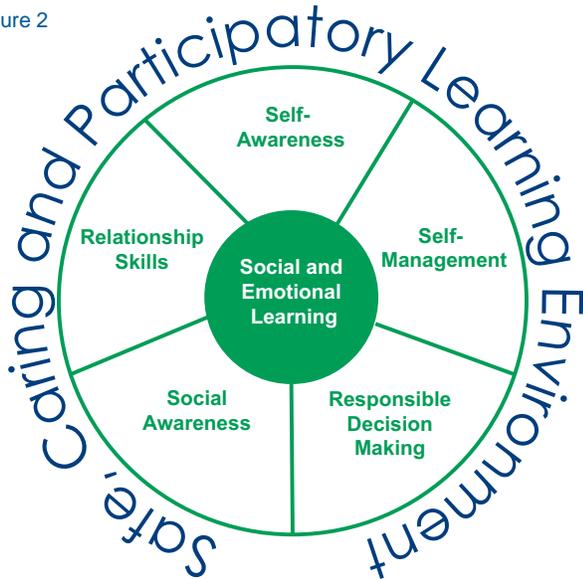
Relationship Skills: Forming healthy relationships, working well with others, resolving conflict peacefully

Responsible Decision-Making: Making sound, ethical decisions that consider social impact and guide personal behavior

Figure 1:
Iowa State University Extension
Targeting Life Skills Model
Patricia Hendricks
November 1996



Figure 2



SEL refers to the development of skills and the creation of an effective learning environment.

How Can 4-H Help Youth Develop their Social and Emotional Skills?

Youth's social and emotional skills are best promoted when adults actively support their development. There are three important ways 4-H volunteers can support youths' social and emotional development. First, be a caring adult who role models effective SEL skills. Youth learn SEL skills by watching adults. Second, look for teachable moments to teach these skills. And third, create a caring and supportive learning environment where youth feel comfortable practicing new skills.

4-H volunteers who are familiar with Positive Youth Development (PYD) may see some similarities with SEL. Both seek similar positive outcomes for youth. SEL, however, focuses more specifically on developing core competencies (see Defining the Core SEL Competencies) that are found to be central to youth's positive development. Also, SEL and PYD both recognize that for youth to develop in positive ways, they need caring relationships, certain opportunities and a supportive learning environment. The eight critical elements of PYD define this more fully; they are:

- Positive relationships with a caring adult
- A welcoming and inclusive environment
- A physically and psychologically safe environment
- An appropriately structured environment
- Opportunities to achieve competency/mastery
- Opportunities for self-determination
- Opportunities to value and practice service to others
- Active participation in the future.

Caring Adults as Role Models

The first PYD critical element is the role of a caring adult. Research demonstrates the impact an adult can have on the positive, healthy development of youth, which includes learning essential SEL skills. Since learning is a social process, relationships have a powerful impact on learning. How adults interact (and model SEL skills) impacts the skills youth learn, how those skills are learned, and the importance youth place on the development of those skills.

Critical Elements Relating to Learning Opportunities

Four other PYD critical elements suggest we provide youth with opportunities for mastery, service, self-determination and a chance to influence the future. Project work, officer leadership roles, and community service activities are some of the educational strategies within the 4-H program that provide youth with these types of opportunities. Volunteers can use these opportunities to explicitly build the SEL skills that are required in these types of activities.

Critical Elements Relating to a Supportive Learning Environment

Three PYD critical elements state the need for learning environments that are safe, inclusive and engaging. We know that youth learn best when they feel socially, emotionally and physically safe. Equally important is creating learning environments that include everyone and hold the attention and interest of all. The learning environment impacts how youth learn both social and emotional life skills and 4-H project knowledge.

What Specifically Can 4-H Volunteers Do?

The 4-H experience provides excellent opportunities to support youth's social and emotional development. The following strategies can be used to strengthen the positive youth development learning experiences of clubs and groups. You will find specific suggestions to enhance SEL. As you read through these strategies, identify which strategies you are already practicing with your group and which you might improve.

More information about Positive Youth Development (PYD) may be found at:
<http://www.4-h.uiuc.edu/opps/pyd-club.html>

<p style="text-align: center;">Welcoming New Members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote social awareness and social skills by having members discuss what it feels like to be new and then brainstorming ways to make new members feel welcome. • Consider holding a club ceremony for new members. • Pair older members as Big Friend/mentors with younger members. • Include mixer activities to help members get to know each other. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Promoting Friendships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help facilitate friendship skills by including shy members in introductions, conversations and interactions. • Encourage officers to plan time for small group activities and recreation. • Intervene when inappropriate interactions occur and discuss more appropriate ways to act. • Promote team building games to help members connect with one another.
<p style="text-align: center;">Solving Problems / Making Decisions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help youth understand how emotions affect their ability to think logically. Before trying to solve a problem, help youth sort through how they are thinking and feeling about the situation. Then have them brainstorm possible solutions. • Support youth in thinking through a problem or decision, rather than telling them what to do. • Allow youth to make their own decisions, and to experience the result. Making some mistakes allows youth to learn from their experiences. • Reflect on the outcome of decisions to learn from the experience. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Serving the Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have youth identify special skills each can contribute to the club's community service project. • Allow youth to take on leadership for the project and work in cooperative teams with adults. • Take time to reflect on the project once it's completed to see what youth learned about themselves and others. • Ask youth to acknowledge other members for their unique contributions. • Consider the feelings of those affected by the project to develop perspective-taking skills.
<p style="text-align: center;">Setting Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach youth how to create a project plan for reaching a goal. • Use SMART for successful goal setting: S – Specific M – Measurable A – Action-oriented R – Realistic T – Timed • Help youth take pride in each step toward reaching their goal by giving appropriate encouragement, advice, and praise. • Encourage internal motivation by encouraging youth to recognize their own accomplishments rather than always looking to others for praise. • Teach youth the importance of delaying gratification by acknowledging little steps to meeting their bigger goals. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Working on Projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tie project work to specific SEL skills. • Connect youth with project leaders who will effectively model and coach SEL skills. • Reflect on project work on a regular basis and encourage youth to think about what skills they are learning and what they have learned about his/herself. • Create opportunities for youth to work cooperatively on projects. • Consider a club project and watch for SEL teachable moments. • Support youth leaders in working with younger youth on projects. • Encourage youth to explore 4-H project areas that are closely related to SEL such as communications, family relations, health, intercultural, intergenerational, leadership, personal development, and workforce preparation.

Exhibiting Projects

- Encourage youth to evaluate their own projects before the event and be prepared to discuss it with the judge.
- Ask a child what s/he thinks or feels about his/her exhibition experience rather than tell him/her. Exhibiting project work can generate a wide range of emotions. Telling youth how s/he should or should not feel devalues his/her feelings and teaches them not to trust him/herself. By asking rather than telling, you help develop his/her self-awareness skills.
- Help youth recognize others' accomplishments and be a good sport if someone else does better.
- Reflect on the judges comments and make new goals for next year's project.

Demonstrating Leadership

- Provide youth with age-appropriate activities that increasingly build their leadership abilities.
- Support youth leaders in exploring how they think and feel about any issue before they take action. Good leaders are aware of how they think and feel and are aware of how that impacts his/her decisions and actions.
- Encourage youth leaders to continually refine his/her social awareness and perspective-taking skills. Great leaders are able to understand the needs and views of all involved, and then facilitate a solution that will be agreeable to everyone.

Summary

Illinois 4-H outreach programs are designed as positive youth development experiences for youth that create unique opportunities to develop the essential life skills that will enable them to be caring, competent, and contributing members of society. Helping youth develop their social and emotional skills contributes to achieving the 4-H mission.

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