



4-H and Positive Youth Development



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4-H is based on a positive youth development (PYD) approach that recognizes all youth have interests, abilities, and strengths that can be enhanced by participation in 4-H programs. Research shows that participation in high quality 4-H programs increases thriving in youth, and thriving youth achieve important developmental outcomes, such as academic motivation and achievement.

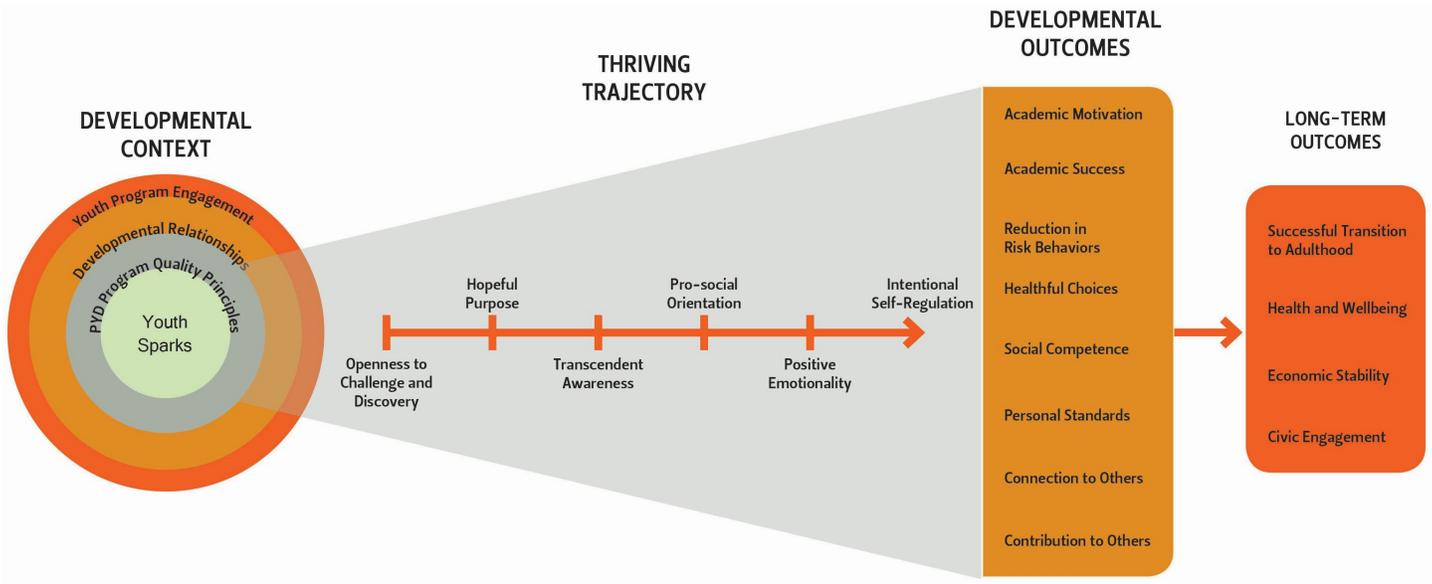
To promote PYD, 4-H programs focus on four important things:

1. **Facilitating youth sparks.** Sparks are the individual interests and passions that a young person brings to 4-H, for example an interest in animals, or computer science. 4-H provides an opportunity for youth to explore their sparks through programs based on their personal interests.
2. **Creating an effective program setting.** To be effective, 4-H programs must be physically and emotionally safe, youth must feel welcome, that they belong and matter, and opportunities for structured learning, skill building and mastery must be provided. Programs also grow and change as the young person does, by placing an increasing emphasis on leadership, civic engagement and identity development in 4-H programs for teens.
3. **Forming developmental relationships.** A positive, supportive relationship between youth and 4-H staff and volunteers is critical to youth development. These relationships are called “developmental” because they grow and change as the young person does. Developmental relationships challenge growth, provide support and encouragement, and, increasingly, share power between youth and adults.
4. **Encouraging youth engagement.** 4-H has its greatest impact on positive youth development when youth are fully engaged in the program, especially when youth participate for multiple years in 4-H. Youth should be encouraged to participate in 4-H actively and regularly, as well as participate in extended 4-H learning opportunities at the local, state, national, and even international level.

Together, these four elements create a developmental context that youth need to learn, grow, and thrive.

4-H is Positive Youth Development

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