



Beyond Ready Summary

4-H Thriving Model

Developmental Context

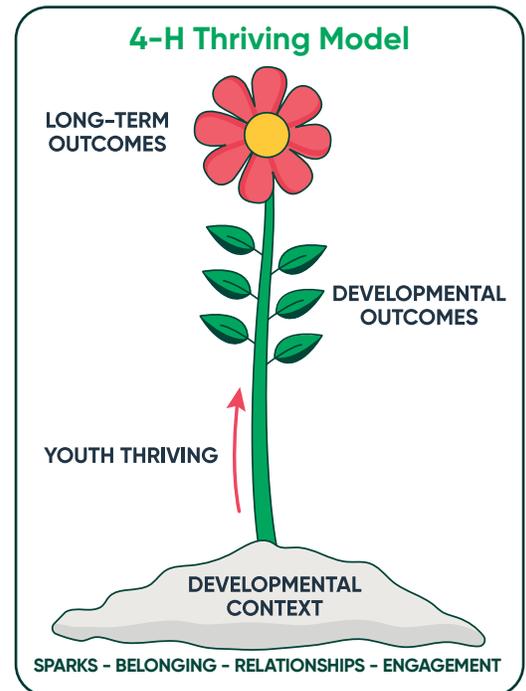


High-Quality Positive Youth Development Programs are the Foundation of Beyond Ready!

The goal of 4-H Beyond Ready is to develop a generation of young people who are healthy, productive, and engaged. The road to readiness through 4-H begins when youth participate in 4-H programs that are high-quality and based on the things that make a difference for youth. Extensive research in youth development has illuminated the critical program aspects that make up a high-quality program.

Four of the program quality elements are included in the 4-H Thriving Model: **Youth Sparks**, **Belonging**, **Developmental Relationships**, and **Youth Engagement**.

The flower image of the 4-H Thriving Model shows these four elements as the "soil" of youth growth and development. Just like a seed needs healthy soil to germinate and grow, youth need a nourishing developmental context in 4-H to thrive and be ready for work and life. Ensuring that youth have a high-quality Positive Youth Development (PYD) experience in 4-H is the foundation of Beyond Ready, and paying attention to these elements when designing programs is essential to programmatic success.



Download a full version of the 4-H Thriving Model:
helping-youth-thrive.extension.org/home

YOUTH SPARKS

Youth sparks are an essential ingredient of thriving. By supporting youth thriving we are helping prepare them for both work and life. Having a spark or sparks gives a young person a sense of joy, personal fulfillment, challenge, and direction. Having a spark facilitates goal setting, a future-orientation, and the development of purpose. Furthermore, sparks appear to be a protective factor for young people, helping to keep them on a positive track because of the young person's intense focus on the source of their spark. Sparks, in turn, motivate youth to succeed in other areas of their lives, such as personal, social, and academic. When sparks are facilitated through 4-H programs, youth are supported to grow and encouraged to overcome obstacles to reach their goals. Helping youth identify and grow their sparks sets the stage for readiness in the future.

BELONGING

The path to readiness through 4-H begins with belonging. Ensuring belonging for all youth is crucial for youth development programs. If youth don't feel welcomed and that they belong, they will likely drop out of the program entirely. When youth belong, they feel safe and are also more willing to trust the guidance of adults as they prepare for life beyond high school. Belonging also reduces isolation and disconnection, both of which are prevalent among young people today, and a major contributor to poor mental health. Belonging in 4-H promotes a sense of self-worth and mattering in youth, which can lead to the development of purpose and a desire to actively contribute to the world—both key indicators of readiness.

DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

Developmental relationships between youth and adults in 4-H is a key driver of youth readiness. The path forward to adulthood is more complex and uncertain than ever before. Youth today face many unknowns and uncertainties, and rely on the help of adults to guide and support them. Youth in 4-H often experience positive relationships with adults, but not necessarily developmental relationships. Developmental relationships are defined by five critical qualities, all of which are foundational to ensuring youth readiness:

- Express Care
- Provide Support
- Expand Possibilities
- Challenge Growth
- Share Power

Developmental Relationships have been studied extensively by researchers at Search Institute. For more detailed information please visit: searchinstitute.org/developmental-relationships

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Youth engagement is a critical aspect of 4-H because it ensures that youth are not just passive recipients of information or activities, but active contributors to their own learning and growth. Engaging youth, especially as teens, helps them learn valuable skills, like leadership, teamwork, critical thinking, planning, and decision-making. To build these skills, youth engagement must be authentic and meaningful, with youth taking active roles in their learning and development.

Go Deeper



View tip sheets on creating a high-quality Developmental Context:

helping-youth-thrive.extension.org/tip-sheets

4-H Professional & Volunteer Training



Interactive, activity-based learning modules are available to help adults develop high-quality Developmental Contexts for youth. Modules are available for download at no cost:

helping-youth-thrive.extension.org/helping-youth-thrive-curriculum-part-one

References

Arnold, M. E. & Ferrari, T. M. (Eds.). (2025). *Positive youth development: Integrating research and practice*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature.



NATIONAL 4-H
COUNCIL



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