



## Life Skills

Life skills are the abilities, knowledge, attitudes and behaviors that must be learned for success and happiness. Life skills enable people to adapt and function effectively in a changing world. Through the development of life skills, children learn to live comfortably with others, express their feelings safely and appropriately and become self-directing, productive and open to new experiences. When individuals feel competent, they feel good about themselves and their ability to cope with the world around them.

The most important life skills for the 5- to 7-year-old age group are:

- **Respecting Self** – Knowing what is unique or special about themselves.
- **Communicating** – Learning how to give and receive messages appropriately.
- **Solving Problems** - Being able to consider a problem, make a decision, see how the decision affects others and taking responsibility for the decision.
- **Thinking Critically** – Having curiosity about the world in which they live and the desire and ability to learn more about something that interests them.
- **Choosing Healthy Lifestyles** – Learning to control fine motor skills (such as writing and cutting) and refining large motor functions (such as jumping and climbing).

## How We Learn

Youth learn in many ways. Sometimes they learn individually, sometimes competitively and sometimes cooperatively – working together so that everyone can reach his or her individual learning goals.

To be well-rounded people and to meet the challenges of today and the future, we need a balance of individual, cooperative and competitive experiences. 4-H offers youth the opportunity for all three types of experiences. Each type has its own benefits and drawbacks and each is appropriate at different times in our lives and for different reasons.

## On My Own – Individual Learning

Individual learning activities, when combined with recognition and approval from parents, leaders or other adults, are appropriate for youth. The youth's individual effort determines the outcome. This style of learning promotes personal growth and development but does not provide participants the opportunity to develop the social skills needed for working with others in a team or group.

## The Fun of Cooperative Learning

Fun is the goal for early elementary aged children involved in an activity. Cooperative learning emphasizes youth working together to accomplish shared goals and allows everyone to participate and contribute regardless of their skill level, age or ability. Cooperative learning promotes positive relationships among individuals and highlights the fun involved in group learning.

Adults working in cooperative learning settings should encourage a child's efforts as well as praising successes. Adults need to recognize each child's accomplishments, the skills developed or improved upon and the role each has played in the group.

An added benefit of cooperative learning is the development of social skills-one of the most important developmental needs of this age.

## Competition: Is it for everyone?

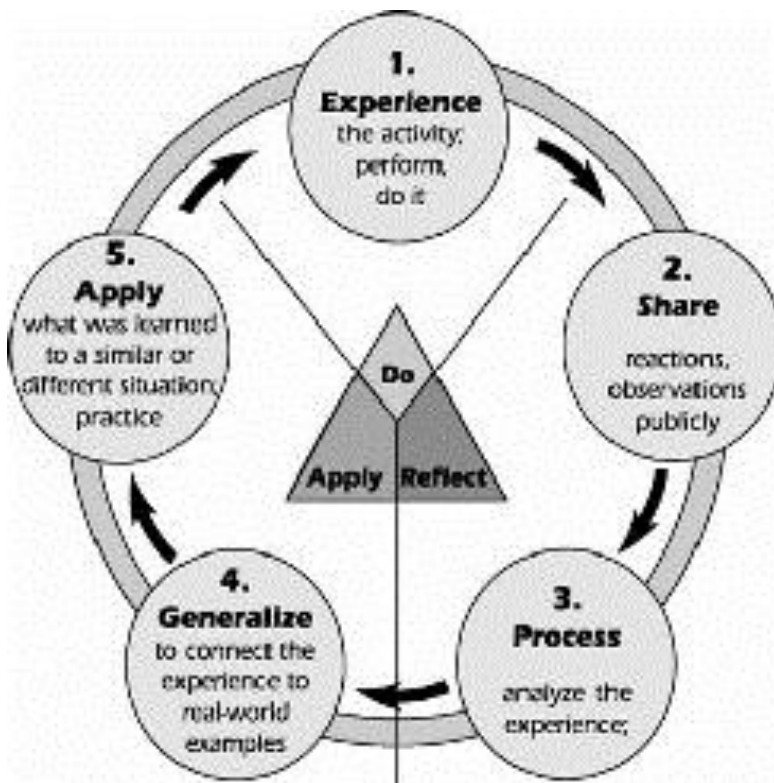
Research shows us competition is not appropriate for children under age nine. Children as young as three or four can sense when someone is better at an activity than they are. When young children are made to compete, it can create distress. Because they have not yet developed reasoning skills, they cannot understand the consequence associated with either winning or losing. Damage to self-esteem is a very real concern for the five to seven year-old group. (Johnson, 1979). These children are in the stage of development where self esteem is established (Glover and Bruning 1987; Hoppe 1990; Williams and Stith, 1987). At this age, instead of building confidence, competition may result in frustration and discouragement.

As children mature, however, they become ready for competition. By age 10 or 11, they begin to handle competition more easily, especially if emphasis is placed on participation rather than winning. By age 12 – 13, competition is appropriate if it emphasizes social involvement, not winning. Competition is appropriate for youth aged 14 – 19, because of the fun and social interaction connected with competitive events. By age 17, a youth is able to strike a balance between competition and cooperation. They perceive themselves as competent and can recognize the positive and negative aspects of competition.

## Experiential Learning Process

The traditional 4-H motto, “learning by doing” is as appropriate today as it was when 4-H began more than 75 years ago. Learning by doing is often referred to as experiential (activity-based) learning.

Experiential learning involves helping a child think through and talk about an activity just completed, to reflect back on what was learned and then to consider how this learning could be used in another situation.



One effective way to help a 4-H'er use the experiential learning model is to question them. The types of questions asked will vary with the experience or activity, but can be as basic as these:

### Sharing Questions

1. What did you do?
2. What happened?
3. What was the most difficult part? Easiest part?

### Processing Questions (Use information generated from sharing questions)

1. What happened in this activity that is like things you have seen or done before?
2. Why did that happen?

3. What if you had....?

**Generalizing Questions**

1. What did you learn through this activity?
2. Why is that important?
3. How does this relate to other things you do? At home? At school? In the community?

**Applying Questions**

1. What did you learn today that will be helpful in the future?
2. How can you use what you learned today in other situations?
3. What will you do next?

One of the greatest gifts leaders can give youth is to help them recognize themselves as capable people. Sometimes that requires the leaders or parent to step back and allow the youth to learn on their own...to learn by doing.