

4-H Volunteer Leaders' Series

Life Skills Through 4-H

Darlene Z. Baker, Ph.D.
Assistant Director -
4-H Youth Development

Experience in 4-H helps persons develop life skills.

What Are Life Skills?

A life skill is an ability that makes a difference in everyday living. Many writers have tried to define life skills:

- A life skill equips a person to perceive and respond to significant life events.
- A life skill is a competency which enables a person to live in an interdependent society.
- A life skill equips a person to be self-directing and productive, to lead a satisfying life and to contribute to society.
- A life skill enables a person to function effectively in a changing world.

Life skills include feelings about one's self and skills for coping; self-esteem and coping skills are essential to human survival, productivity and community. Life skills are personal – an expression of the self. Life skills are interpersonal – including relationships with others, problem solving and participation in the larger human community.

A life skill is an expression of the whole person; a person with ability to live well has life skills. Life skills:

- Require thinking or reasoning, the use of one's mind.
- Express feelings, are rooted in one's emotions.
- Symbolize attitudes, reveal one's posture toward others and life.
- Are actions well performed: behaviors in which thought and feelings and attitudes find a unified expression.

A skill is something a person does – “a behavioral manifestation” of the self. A life skill increases proficiency of living; life skills make a difference in quality of life.

Life Skills Can Be Learned

Life skills are learned. Learning a life skill requires both training and practice. The “4-H formula for learning” (shown below) begins with the interests of the learner and includes the experience of success:



*18 U.S.C. 707

Visit our web site at:
<http://www.uaex.edu>

4-H Formula for Learning

a question or interest + a new idea: knowledge + practice or rehearsal + success or reinforcement = LEARNING

Nonformal education through 4-H helps the member choose an area of interest, provides knowledge through print and people, expects the learner to practice the learning through the project and offers a setting for examining results in order to identify and recognize success. The 4-H program provides a setting for learning life skills.

Life skills are learned by degree – one step at a time. The learning moves from simple skills toward complex skills; completion of a simple task lays the foundation for trying a more complicated task another time. Successful performance of a complex role may sharpen and integrate several skills learned at an earlier age.

Life skills are learned throughout one's lifetime. The roots of capacity for relationships develop in infancy. The years of 9-12 are times for developing a sense of competency about doing – the ability to perform simple and necessary tasks. In adolescence many relationships and skills are reworked as the developing self emerges. The young adult uses life skills in establishing an independent life. During the middle years, life skills are used, verified and elaborated, and shared with younger persons. In the years of maturity, memories of life skills well performed flow into the sense of integrity and personal satisfaction with a life well lived. Life skills are learned by children, youth and adults. Life skills continue throughout one's lifetime.

General Life Skills

The five basic life skills are:

1. The 4-H'er develops self – seeks the fullest unique potential as a person.
2. The 4-H'er learns how to learn – develops a spirit of life-long inquiry and knows how to obtain information when it is needed.
3. The 4-H'er uses knowledge – can apply what is known in a productive way which contributes to the betterment of the community and the world.
4. The 4-H'er develops a sense of social responsibility – becomes aware of the community and its concerns and is willing to be involved in improving the community.
5. The 4-H'er relates to changes – knows that life is constantly changing; expects to live in a changing world.

Life Skills and Project Learning

Learning the five general life skills is easily illustrated with the 4-H project which provides an ideal setting for learning.

A 4-H member working on a project will:

1. Develop self if:
 - Comfort and acceptance from the group is felt.
 - Self-expression and sharing of ideas and experience occur.
 - Support and encouragement are felt from leaders, members and family.
2. Learn how to learn if:
 - Interest and involvement are part of the project planning.
 - There is freedom to question, discuss and explore, building on what is already known.
 - There is a free exchange of ideas and experiences and especially if the member can be the “teacher.”
 - There are adequate knowledge resources and data available.
 - One idea at a time is presented, with understandings moving from simple to complex.
 - The learning environment involves seeing as well as hearing, and an opportunity to do the new idea.
3. Use knowledge if:
 - What has been learned at a project meeting can be applied to a real situation, e.g., to grow a plant or solve a problem.
 - What has been learned can be generalized to larger vocational concerns, e.g., to a garden or nursery.
 - Adult models use this knowledge in their work.
 - The knowledge becomes part of the 4-H project record.
4. Develop a sense of social responsibility if:
 - The project learning is understood to meet a social need, e.g., producing food for a hungry world.
 - The project learning can be used in an activity which improves the local community.
5. Relate to change if:
 - There is satisfaction and gladness in learning a new skill and recognition for completing a difficult task.
 - There is assurance of help or support when needed.
 - A change is understood to be a part of the life process, an attitude is developed which accepts and welcomes change.

Life Skills and Leadership Roles

4-H programs offer many opportunities for members and adult volunteers to assume leadership roles. These roles embody functions which must occur to assure the life and work of the group. A leader is a person who can help a group to accomplish its goals. Leaders may be elected or appointed. Common leadership roles include president, vice president, secretary, reporter, organizational leader, project leader and activity leader. Larger clubs need many more leadership roles.

A person must have certain life skills in order to perform the duties of any leadership role. These life skills develop as the person has successful leadership experiences. Skills learned in one leadership position are useful in many life situations.

Life skills identified as basic to leadership development include:

1. Understanding self
2. Learning
3. Decision making
4. Management
5. Communications
6. Working in groups
7. Getting along with others

Life Skills Developed Through 4-H Meetings

1. Express self before a group
2. Self-confidence
3. Learn to meet people and exchange ideas
4. Learn to work with others – cooperation
5. Learn to complete things which are begun
6. Goal setting – based on priorities
7. Express own feelings
8. Establishing positive relationships
9. Problem-solving process
10. Coping with conflict
11. Understanding others – values differ – accepting diverse ideas
12. Accepting decisions by the group
13. Abiding by accepted rules – parliamentary procedure
14. Accepting defeat or success
15. Work with and for others
16. Supervise or direct others
17. Sharing
18. Reinforcing others
19. Following directions
20. Flexibility
21. Keeping records
22. Relating to others

23. Creativity
24. Handling emotions
25. Speaking up for personal ideas or convictions
26. Contributing to a group
27. Listening
28. Reaching consensus
29. Teamwork

Life Skills Developed Through 4-H Project Work

1. Set goals
2. Planning
3. Gather information and do research
4. Technical skills
5. Keep records
6. Schedule time and plan ahead
7. Complete things started
8. Work with others
9. Work with supervision
10. Career possibilities
11. Using knowledge
12. Learning to learn
13. Problem solving
14. Formation of beneficial habits
15. Identifying personal interests and abilities
16. Accepting defeat or success

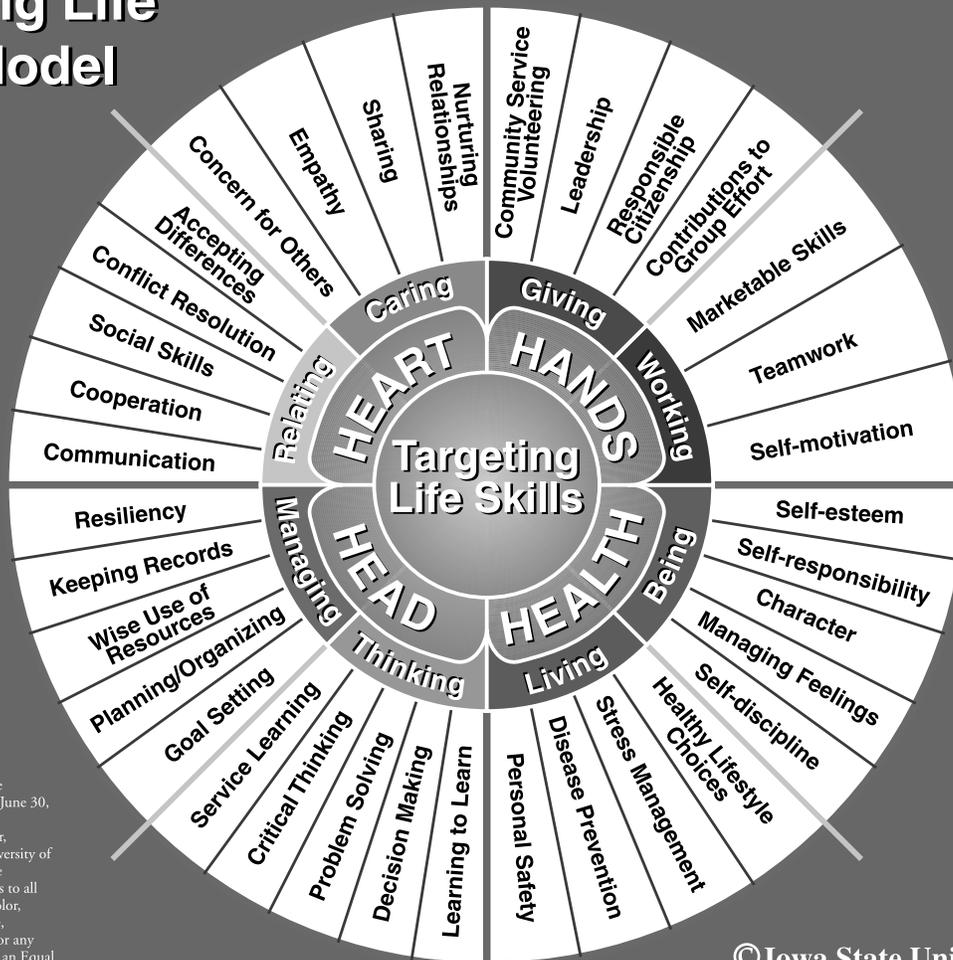
Life Skills Model

The Targeting Life Skills Model (C-482) was developed with the leadership of Patricia A. Hendricks, Extension youth development specialist, Iowa State University, to help conceptualize the life skills which can be developed through participation in the 4-H program. The model's categories of life skills are identified and divided on the basis of the familiar four H's from the 4-H Clover that represent Head, Heart, Hands and Health. Two general categories for skills are included under each of the four headings. Specific life skills are identified under each of the two general categories. The model provides a format for incorporating learning experienced for life skills development into youth program planning, thereby assisting youth to reach their full potential.

Life Skills Are Skills for Life!

Life skills are basic to self-esteem, coping and surviving; persons with life skills contribute to the responsible human community. Life skills emerge as a person successfully completes learning experiences which are meaningful and satisfying. The 4-H program provides a setting for nonformal learning in which the development of life skills can be a primary concern. 4-H human development through nonformal education is for life!

Targeting Life Skills Model



Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Arkansas. The Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, gender, age, disability, marital or veteran status, or any other legally protected status, and is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

*Protected Under 18 U.S.C. 707

© Iowa State University Extension Targeting Life Skills Model – 1996

Reprinted for use in Arkansas from materials prepared by Faye Caskey, Agriculture Extension Service, University of Minnesota. Updated by Beverly Hines, former 4-H and youth development specialist, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Arkansas.

Printed by University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service Printing Services.

DR. DARLENE Z. BAKER is assistant director - 4-H youth development, University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, Little Rock.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Arkansas. The Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, gender, age, disability, marital or veteran status, or any other legally protected status, and is an Equal Opportunity Employer.