

4-H Volunteer Leaders' Series

Understanding Youth

Mike Klumpp
4-H Youth
Development
Specialist

Five Basic Needs of Youth

Every young person has needs, interests, desires, values, strengths and weaknesses which are going to affect behavior. While all youth have different personalities, they are alike in many ways. All young people have five basic needs in common.

1. **BELONGING.** The desire to belong is natural and helps to bring youth in contact with others. Belonging to the group helps young people grow because part of their feeling of personal worth is gained from what others think of them.
2. **AFFECTION.** Affection or love is essential in personality development. We need to know that we are wanted and loved in spite of our shortcomings.
3. **ACHIEVEMENT.** Youth want to know that their efforts are worthwhile and appreciated. Projects and activities need to keep pace with ability since the rate of achievement varies with each member. Doing things for others as well as for themselves should be included.
4. **INDEPENDENCE.** Becoming independent of parents is a sign of growing up. The desire to be independent is often troublesome to parents and leaders, but it cannot be avoided if the boy or girl is to grow up normally. This desire is shown by an impatience with adult leaders' guidance and a preference for making up their own minds.

5. **NEW EXPERIENCES.** Young people need and want to grow up and be active. They need new and different experiences to stretch their horizons.

Why Do Young People Behave as They Do?

In human development, most youth in an age group have some general characteristics. However, remember that each child develops at his own pace. These general characteristics will not be observed in all children at the same age or at the same stage of development. Each person is a unique individual.

Pre-Teens 9- to 12-Year Olds

Late childhood is the time to explore many areas until skills are found that catch interest and challenge ability. Members will want to demonstrate what they can do. Keep in mind individual talents and abilities. Adults can help children gain self-confidence and maturity.

At this age, interest is high in making things. Large muscle control is fairly well developed; fine finger control may not be accomplished until 12 years or later. Select group projects which use tools and equipment that encourage physical skills.

Group and club membership is very important. Use symbols, ceremonies and songs.

Youth are largely dependent on adults, but begin to want to do things



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through their own efforts. Develop leadership by assigning leadership jobs when possible. Youth idealize adults and look to them as a source of authority. Give members security and the knowledge that they are loved and accepted.

Keep parents informed; they remain a strong influence. Young people have limited decision-making abilities; adult guidance will be needed in selecting and conducting projects.

Members will be active and energetic. Plan instruction carefully and in small doses. Activities should be chosen so the members will experience early success.

Early Teens 12- to 14-Year-Olds

Young people want, most of all, to feel wanted by their contemporaries. Provide situations where members feel at ease and have a chance to show their skills and grace before the group. Encourage co-educational groups that are largely social and recreational.

Youth will be interested in skills with utility. Emphasize teaching one particular skill.

In the gang stage, friends of the same age and sex become important. They want to dress, talk and do as the gang does. Youth feel the need to belong to and be accepted by their own age group.

Youth are striving for increased freedom from adult controls. Set reasonable boundaries of behavior. Let members help make decisions on rules and live within established boundaries.

Activities centering around personal grooming begin to be important. At this time there is a pre-occupation with the body and a worry about belonging.

Older Teens 15- to 19-Year-Olds

Teens can plan and carry out activities on their own. Leaders need to act as advisors at this stage of the youth's development rather than as leader-directors.

Teens often need someone to talk to outside of the family. Be willing to lend an ear to their problems. Listening is the key to good communication.

Being part of a mixed group is important. Social and recreational activities are of high interest.

Democratic group procedures and discussions of social and economic problems will help to develop decision-making abilities and good judgment.

Guidelines for Successful Leading

1. Be sensitive to feelings of members. See that an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance is provided to help members feel comfortable.
2. Work individually as well as collectively with members. Provide some time to work with each member as an individual, especially in helping to set goals, plan activities and evaluate progress.
3. Individual integrity is encouraged when the member is considered for what he is rather than for what he does. Accept youth as they are rather than as you wish them to be.
4. Recognize and allow for individual differences. Youth vary in ability, interests, desires, areas of sensitivity and goals.
5. The progress of the individual can best be rewarded by recognition from the person working most closely with him/her.
6. Records are one way to recognize progress. Learn the value of self-evaluation methods and use them. The leader must help them learn to evaluate their own progress.
7. Recognize that competition can be cruel. Youth should be given the opportunity to elect individually whether or not to compete without being pressured.
8. Recognize that the ability and willingness to accept responsibility is learned through opportunity and practice.
9. Decision making is learned through practice in reviewing alternatives, making a choice, setting goals and evaluating progress.
10. Use a democratic approach. Work with members to make decisions jointly.

MIKE KLUMPP is 4-H youth development specialist, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Arkansas, Little Rock.

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