



4-H VOLUNTEER TRAINING SERIES

Learn by Doing + a Little Bit More



“Learn by doing” is a common phrase used by staff and volunteers to explain how 4-H youth development teaches life skills. Although common, it does not sufficiently describe how learning takes place. **4-H relies on a five step experiential learning model to teach life and content skills. The sequential steps of the model help youth reflect upon the experience or activity and to apply learning to other experiences or situations.**

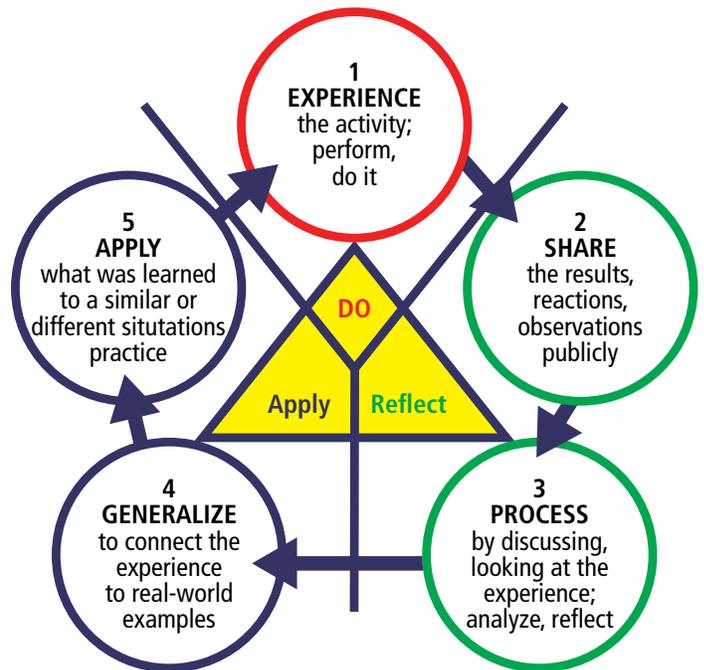
The process begins with an activity or experience that youth are asked to perform. It is followed by a discussion that assists the learner in discovering new meaning through the use of purposeful questions. The process culminates in either using questions that help youth apply what has been learned, or a new activity that provides opportunity for learner to apply concepts or skills learned through the activity or experience. In a nutshell the model is:

1. **Experience** by doing or performing a concrete activity.
2. **Share** the experience by describing what happened, through self and or public reflection.

3. **Process** the experience to determine what was most important and identify common themes.
4. **Generalize** from the experience, and relate it to their daily lives
5. **Apply** what they learned to a new situation. (Kolb, 1985)

“Experiential Education takes place when a person involved in an activity looks back and evaluates it, determines what was useful or important to remember, and uses this information to perform another activity.” (John Dewey, 1938)

When this model is used, participants both **experience and process the activity.**



Using this model helps youth construct new knowledge. This model is supported by cognitive and social learning theory and is consistent with variations to the model such

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as inquiry learning, and the learning cycle commonly used in science education today.

What are the advantages of using experiential learning versus a traditional approach?

- It is more fun for youth. Would you rather be told something or discover it for yourself?
- It gives youth a voice. Everyone is active and sharing.
- It is empowering. Youth are the center of focus not the teacher or leader.
- It fosters belonging. Youth are engaged with other youth and leaders, learning and sharing with each other.
- It seems more like play than school or work. Youth choose to be in 4-H programs, experiential learning helps respect this.

How can I do it?

1. **Set up the doing experience.** Choose a concrete, hands-on activity that immediately focuses the attention on the learner rather than the leader. The leader should provide guidance throughout the experience, but not be directive – the goal is for the youth to “experience” the activity in order to develop the life skill.



The most important aspect of this learning model is what a leader does.

Remember to:

- Show enthusiasm
- Use encouragements
- Make eye contact and smile.
- Sit on your hands. Let the youth figure out how to do it, or let them explore before you share your knowledge.
- Use the entire learning space (try not to be in front of the room).
- Watch and listen to the youth. Ask yourself: what are they stuck on, what information do they not understand, what kind of questions can I ask that will help them understand or discover something new?

4-H has designed many activities using the experiential education model. Check any 4-H Project booklet for ideas.

2. **Process the Experience** (Share, Process and Generalize) –The primary purpose of processing is to allow youth the opportunity to integrate their learning, help them construct new meaning, and provide a sense of closure or completeness to their experience. The leader can assist in this process by:
 - Setting aside enough time to reflect on the experience(s).
 - Asking the open-ended questions that direct the learning.
 - Listening carefully.
 - Using wait-time for responses from participants (5 seconds helps).

The questions you ask are important. Leaders can prepare the questions ahead of time, but need to be flexible enough to allow youth to take the conversation into a new direction.

Share – Sharing is accomplished by asking learners to reflect upon what they did. Ask questions that help them think about:

- What they did.
- What they saw; felt; heard; smelled, tasted; etc.
- What part of the experience was the most difficult and what was the easiest for them.

Process – In this step, youth are asked to think about how the experience was conducted or how the activity was performed. Questions should lead youth to think about:

- What procedures or steps they used in doing the activity.
- What problems or issues came up as they did the activity.
- How they dealt with these problems.
- How did they think the activity or experience was going to work
- Why the life skill they practiced is important

Generalize – In this step, the discussion becomes more personal and focuses on what the experience means to the participant and what is learned. The subject matter alone can remain the focus of the discussion in all five steps of the model, or a part of the discussion can be shifted to other life skills youth practice while working with the subject matter. For example, if the method employed required the youth to work in teams to complete the activity, then questions about teamwork would be appropriate. If the activity requires youth to communicate then communication skills can be discussed. Questions should lead youth to determine:



- What they learned from the experience.
- How this learning relates to or compares with other things they have been learning.
- What similar experiences they have had with this life skill or subject matter.

Apply – This final step in the model directs youth to apply what they learned to their lives.

Questions are structured to address:

- How what they learned relates to them personally or other parts of their lives.
- How they can use what they learned in various places.
- How they can apply what they learned to future situations.

Remember to allow 4H'ers to direct the learning and decide what is next starting the learning cycle over. You may also engage youth in another activity that actually applies what they have learned in this stage. This allows you to assess if they have learned the concept or skill.

Tips on asking questions

Have a list of open-ended questions ready.

Questions should start with easier concrete questions and progress to analysis or synthesis type of questions.

As you watch youth perform the activity jot down interesting observations- these can be used to help you create good questions on the spot.

Youth reluctant to answer questions in a group will often open up with one or two of their peers. You may want to ask the group to form pairs or triads to discuss something and to report the highlights of that discussion with the larger group.

Sometimes youth will respond to a statement that you have them finish, such as “I learned that _____,”

I was frustrated with _____.”

Try not to put youth on the spot. If they don't want to answer move on.

Adjust your questions based upon the responses youth give. Continue to help them build on their experiences.

Don't forget to use wait time (5 seconds or more before you rephrase your question). Try not to answer for youth. Remember you want to find out what they know.

When youth start talking and asking each other questions about the activity and you can back out of the conversation you know good learning is occurring!

Resources

Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service. (n.d.). 4-H 101: The Basics of Starting 4-H Clubs. *Using an Experiential Learning Model*. pp 31-37.

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Kolb, D. (1984) *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

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