

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development

Leaders can support the positive development of all children by supporting elements of a quality youth experience:

Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity

BELONGING

Perhaps the most important need for children in grades 5K-2, the need to belong can be met in many ways. Children need to know they are cared about by others and feel connected to the others in the group. Developmentally, 5K-2 children are still learning how to behave in a group and relate to adults and each other. It is critical that adults provide an environment where all children feel physically and emotionally safe while actively participating in a group.

- Learn children's names and help children get to know each other's names.
 - Play games that help children get reacquainted with one another at each gathering.
 - Help children have fun and feel connected to each other by playing cooperative games.
 - Plan games where children are allowed to participate in the entire game (no one "gets out").
- Greet children and families warmly each time they arrive at a gathering - even if you are in the middle of an activity.
- Encourage children to interact with each other during crafts and other individual activities.
- Recognize children who are behaving well and let them know you have noticed their positive behavior.
- Try not to remove children from the group; remove only if child's behavior is hurtful to themselves or others.
- Meet regularly. While frequency and duration may vary, to support group belonging a minimum of once or twice per month is suggested.
- Create identifiers (name, t-shirts) that acknowledge that they belong to the group.
- Reinforce children's belonging within a family; get to know the children's family members/care providers and invite them to help with planning programs, special trips, or events. Schedule family-focused activities to encourage involvement in their child's learning.

MASTERY

Children need to feel they are capable and successful at meeting challenges to develop their self-confidence. They also develop different skills at varying rates and groups may contain a wide range of abilities. This is a time to experiment with new skills and experiences while they continue to grow physically, cognitively, and emotionally. Children at this age do not yet have a strong understanding of their own abilities in relationship to others. Therefore, activities and contests where individual children are judged or compete are not appropriate at this age.

- Emphasize the experience and learning over the product.
- Recognize children’s efforts and display their work.
- Offer quality and varied materials for the different needs, abilities, and learning styles of children.
- Offer experiences with variations in pace, alternate “sit down” and “stand up” tasks, and have children use all their senses.
- Plan learning in a variety of topic areas and subject matters.
- Allow children to try new or alternative ways to complete tasks; choose tasks that promote creative problem solving.
- Incorporate opportunities for cooperation, teamwork, and group learning.

INDEPENDENCE

Children need to know they can influence other people and events. Children in grades 5K-2 are still learning about cause and effect when it comes to their behavior; a major task of this age group is to learn self-control. Set them up for success.

- Allow children to work out disagreements among themselves; provide guidance when needed.
- Give an overview of the planned activity in advance, so children know what to expect; before transitions, give children notice of impending change.
- Establish positive behavior expectations (what children SHOULD do, not what they “shouldn’t”) and use reminders as needed.
- Give short, clear, direct instructions. Break down complex activities into small sections and give directions when prior steps have been successfully completed.
- Choose challenging but achievable activities.
- Build opportunities for choice: involve children in selecting topics and activities.

GENEROSITY

Children need to be able to “give back” to others in their lives. Family is the primary relationship for children; during this developmental stage they are beginning to form relationships at school and in their immediate community (school, neighborhood, for example). Meaningful opportunities for service include helping individuals in their daily life and learning more about the needs in their community. By exploring the community through service, children begin to develop connections and caring for others.

- Encourage sharing within the group.
- Ask children to help you and help others (for example, passing out materials, demonstrating tasks, cleaning up the space). Acknowledge and appreciate their contributions.
- Promote role play and taking the perspective of others to increase their understanding of other people’s feelings.
- Provide opportunities to learn about members of the community.
- Share stories, examples, and role model generosity and service.
- Include them in service learning activities of the larger group; help them choose service activities that are meaningful to this age group.

*Adapted from Iowa 4-H CloverkidsToolbox; Iowa State University – Extension & Outreach & University of Minnesota Extension Cloverbuds Volunteer Leader Guide.



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