
4-H LEADS FOR LEADERS

UNDERSTANDING YOUTH

90501Q

Leader's Guide



Young people have needs, interests, desires and values that shape the way they behave. The external actions of youth most often are motivated by the feelings they have about themselves. Adults who are significant in the lives of youth play an important role in helping these youngsters develop health attitudes and feelings about themselves. When adults comprehend the basic needs and stages of a child's development, it is easier to understand why they sometimes behave in ways that are hard to embrace.

Some basic needs that all young people have in common are:

The need to belong

As social beings, youth must feel accepted and wanted by others. A sense of belonging makes the youngster feel appreciated and respected. A healthy perception of personal worth comes from how others treat you and what others think of you.

The need to be free from fear and intimidation

Youngsters who feel safe are open to trust others. When youth can move from place to place, activity to activity with confidence, a greater degree of learning takes place and positive relationships can be created and maintained.

The need to feel capable

Youngsters must have opportunities to master things in life. When people feel they are good at certain tasks, are acknowledged and receive praise for their accomplishments, they are less likely to resist a challenge when things get a little tough at times.

The need to be recognized, accepted and appreciated because of differences
People are different in many ways as a result of conditions and circumstances beyond their control. Differences in size, shape, color and abilities do not make one more worthy than another. Understanding is the key to accepting and appreciating differences.

Developmental Tasks of Youth

During the transition period from childhood to adulthood, young people are faced with certain “growing-up” jobs or developmental tasks. Successful achievement at one age leads to happiness and success at later stages. Failure often leads to unhappiness, disapproval by society and difficulty with other people.

The developmental tasks of adolescents include the following:

Learning to accept and handle a changing body

In late childhood and the early teens, boys and girls usually undergo a period of rapid growth in height, weight and total physical development. Different parts of their bodies grow at different rates, often making it difficult for them to control their movements effectively. Each will grow at his or her own rate. Some will mature early, others late. Young people need reassurance that they will eventually “even out”—that those who mature late will catch up with those who mature early, that teeth can be straightened and proper food and care can clear up pimples. However, they should also be helped to recognize that some of their physical characteristics will not change, for example, their body build, long neck or thick ankles. They must learn to accept the reality of their appearance, to make the most of their good features and to camouflage less desirable ones. They can also learn to develop their special talents and a warm, friendly personality.

Because girls, on the average, mature from one and a half to two years earlier than boys, they are ready for grown-up jobs earlier and usually demonstrate greater leadership than boys that are in the same group. In the later teens, boys begin to catch up and assume leadership roles.

Learning to get along with peers of both sexes

The young person who is not accepted by his peers is in trouble. The need to be wanted, to belong and be accepted by the group is behind the idea that teenagers, especially, must dress alike, have the same hair style, listen to the same records and do what other youth do. The young person who does not accomplish this task of getting along with his/her peers at this period in life is likely to have a much harder time later on.

It is possible for a discerning leader to help the youngsters on the “outside” gain acceptance and approval of the group by teaching a skill or developing a talent that is of interest to or needed by group members.

The 4-H program provides recreational activities, discussion groups, social events, tours and community service activities in which young people can learn to get along with their peers.

Learning how to handle boy-girl relationships

Courtship, marriage and parenthood lie just ahead for teenage boys and girls. They need opportunities in wholesome environments to work together, to talk, dance and play with the opposite sex. Being a part of a mixed group in such activities help develop a feeling of ease. They need to see each other in a variety of situations expressing many emotions.

During this time young people need help in learning to distinguish between infatuation and more lasting forms of love, and to learn to control the new interests and urges that are awakening within them. They need to recognize that masculine and feminine roles are changing and may be different now than when their parents were growing up.

Learning those attitudes and skills needed to develop competence for jobs and careers

Choosing a future career is not an easy task, especially in today's complex world where it is hard to know what the jobs of the future will be. Exploring some of the many 4-H projects and activities, young people have a chance to learn new skills and discover their aptitudes and interests. This involvement can help youth decide the kind of occupation or career to pursue. Leaders can help young people learn to do things well, complete what they start, accept responsibility, and work well with others. All of these are important in entering the world of work.

Leaders also can help 4-H youth see the need to stay in school and get further education and training beyond high school to prepare themselves for jobs in the future.

Gaining independence in relationships with adults, yet learning cooperation and interdependence

This is a difficult task, for it sometimes involves friction between youth and adults, mainly their parents, as youngsters struggle to "cut the apron strings." Parents who have had the responsibility for guiding and caring for their children may find it hard to let go. They may be worried about the many pitfalls that can lure youth into trouble.

Young people, on the other hand, want to learn and do things for themselves, stand on their own feet and make their own decisions. This is what parents and adult leaders want for youth as it is a necessary, desirable, but actual part of growing up.

Wise parents and leaders begin early to allow youth to make choices, to help them think through problems and situations and come up with their own answers. Youth must learn, however, that no one is entirely independent and that a good deal of “give and take” is necessary in their relationships with people of all ages.

As young people grow and mature, parents and leaders need to loosen the reins a little, cut down on demands, involve youth in making those decisions affecting their personal lives, be more consistent in treating youth as young adults, give more praise and encouragement and less criticism and correction, give youth the assurance that support and assistance is available when they need it.

Developing values and standards to live by

During the growing-up period, young people need guidance to develop a sense of right and wrong, of justice and fair play. They need to establish worthy ideals and standards by which to live. They need to develop an awareness of human needs and a willingness to serve others. It is a big step toward maturity when a person can think beyond his/her own interests and needs to those of others.

Characteristics of Youth

Young people develop physically, intellectually, socially and emotionally. There are certain growth and behavior patterns, interests and attitudes that characterize various age groups. It is wise to remember, children are different and do different things at different times. Adults should not expect to observe the same characteristics in all children simply because they may be the same age. The chart shows the normal progression of development and offers suggestions for leaders. *Remember these are recommendations for working with children in your club.* When you get to know your members better, you will be able to adapt your behavior to their levels of development.

5-year-olds

Physical. Handles sled and tricycle well, maybe two-wheeler with training wheels. Hops, skips, climbs, slides and swings. Handles most dressing. Can stand on one foot. Can walk a straight line without stepping off. Can broad jump. Attempts all kinds of physical feats. Learns to throw, kick, catch a ball. Holds pencil like adult. Dances and can keep beat. Permanent teeth starting. Cuts, pastes and draws pictures. Handles tools. Left- or right-handed.

Intellectual. 2,200 words in vocabulary. Can give name, age, address and birthday. Can sort size, color and shape. Talks plainly. Recognizes some numbers and letters. Great imagination. May start to collect things. Enjoys jokes, rhymes, riddles and nonsense songs.

Emotional. Learning what is right to do and say. Tends to be reliable, stable, well-adjusted. Proud of possessions. Can usually tell between true and false. Still has some fears. Wants to be treated like an adult. Can accept fair punishment. Impulsive behavior at times.

Social. Is tattletale. Needs adult supervision. Sometimes hits and pushes. Wants to please adults. Likes to make friends. Calm and friendly. Can give, receive and share. Learns fair play. Sense of humor. Role plays. Prefers other children. Becomes competitive. More dependent on peers.

Implications for Leaders:

Five-year-olds have short attention spans and may not stick with any one thing for an extended period. Introduce children to new activities especially those that include building or making things with materials of different textures. When working with children in this age group, select a place where spills and other messes will be easy to clean and will not harm furniture. Five-year-olds like to play “make-believe” and guessing games. Provide safe materials and props for children to dress up, play grown-up or characters from their favorite books or stories.

6-, 7- and 8-year-olds

6-year-olds

Physical. Is very active—likes to roughhouse. May be clumsy and may dawdle. Can throw and catch balls. Can balance on one leg. Likes to make things—color, paint and cook.

Intellectual. Doesn't understand that people think and feel differently from one another. Believes other people know and feel what they feel. Can follow simple rules and directions. Understands the meanings of sharing and taking turns. Shows interest in books, records and musical instruments.

Emotional. Self-centered, can be bossy, stubborn, fearful and impatient. Feels hurt when called names. Is ashamed of mistakes, fears and tears. Is possessive of belongings.

Social. Outgoing. Can be bossy. Often pairs up with a “best friend” and leaves out other children. More ready to give out than to receive criticism. Doesn't like to lose. Begins to prefer same-sex friends. Likes group activities.

7-year-olds

Physical. Active, but quieter than at 6. Develops body awareness—sensitive about being touched or seen naked. Likes to build and create things. Likes to play board games like Monopoly.

Intellectual. Begins to sort through and think about information learned at school. Gains a better understanding of language—vocabulary grows to over 2,500 words. Interested in collecting things. Questions are fewer but more meaningful. Likes thoughtful art projects like cutting and pasting.

Emotional. Aware of self and others—realizes people think and feel differently. Worries about being liked and accepted by others. Can be serious and moody. Will avoid criticism. Enjoys talking more than cuddling with parents and caregivers. Less stubborn than at 6.

Social. Enjoys playing alone as well as with friends. Can be a tattletale. Needs approval of friends and adults. Wants to do everything right—will ask for lots of directions.

8-year-olds

Physical. Very active. Seeks out new experiences and tries new ideas. Likes to help with adult jobs. Can work on projects alone, but needs direction. Makes up new games and rules for games. Likes table games such as cards and checkers.

Intellectual. Begins to understand that people think and feel differently from one another. Are curious about nature, people, sex, other countries. Likes to have conversations with adults. Likes to try to solve problems and puzzles.

Emotional. Understands she or he can do some things better than others. Judgmental and critical of self and others. Self-confident. Often more polite away from home. Can be dramatic with emotions. Likes to pretend he or she is another person (characters from books, movies, famous people).

Social. Very social—does not like to play alone. Prefers to play only with same-sex friends. Friendships are closer and important. Talks constantly and likes to gossip and argue. Forms secret clubs, makes up codes and passwords to build a world away from adults. Wants adults to like them.

Implications for Leaders:

Children in this age category are becoming more independent as their ties begin to change from parents to school friends and other adults. Their new found independence and interests help them move beyond their families into clubs and activities where they form wider friendships. By late 7 and early 8, boys like playing with boys and girls enjoy the company of other girls. At this age, however, both boys and girls enjoy cooking experiences with adults. This is an age when children begin collecting things that interest them. They are able to gather, organize and classify items as their intellectual skills are becoming broader. Children at 6, 7 and 8 work hard to finish projects. Allow time for children to reach their goals because their confidence grows as they attain mastery. Children at this age also take failure and disappointments seriously. If a child is disappointed with the results of a project, encourage him or her to continue trying. Allow children to engage in events and projects that are a bit challenging but not too complex. Children must be able to experience a degree of success while avoiding frustrating experiences.

9-, 10- and 11-year-olds

Physical. Continued slow, steady physical growth. Girls may experience growth spurts and feel out of place with own age groups.

Intellectual. Manipulative skills still developing. Large muscle control is fairly well developed, fine finger control may not be accomplished until 12 years or later. Poor coordination. Girls may surpass boys in use of finger muscles.

Emotional. Largely dependent on adults, but begins to want to do things through own efforts. Need and want advice, counsel and protection. Look to adults as source of authority. Parents remain a strong influence, they idealize adults.

Social. Desires to belong. Accepts rules and regulations. Likes symbols and ceremonies. Friends usually are of the same sex. As they approach teenage, friends become more important.

Implications for Leaders:

Reassure both boys and girls that it is natural for children to grow differently and within a few years, most boys will again be taller than girls. Select projects that use tools and equipment that encourage physical development. Remember, some activities requiring the use of small muscles, like the fingers may be difficult. Children's work will be less than perfect, sincere praise is needed for encouragement. Group and club membership are important, hold ceremonies for new member initiation and officer installation. Organize beginning phases of activity groups with boys together and girls together unless the children object. Adult leaders take responsibility first and later develop leadership activities. Show love and acceptance, keep parents informed of children's involvement and progress *and* become the role model children need and can respect.

12- and 13-year-olds

Physical. Girls develop breasts, are usually taller and heavier than boys of same age. Some begin to experience menstrual cycle but may still be irregular.

Intellectual. Disregards childhood hobbies. Beginning of independent-dependent struggle. *Creativity stage* begins, last until about 17 years

Emotional. Working on identity. Needs reassurance about temporary differences from others in size and development. Retains many dependent needs (clothing shelter, support) but also wants independence. Clarify who they are.

Social. Becomes less involved in family activities. Reluctant to accept adult advice or criticism. No longer the compliant, agreeable, disciplined child. Child questions, talks back and tests out.

Implications for Leaders:

Emphasize good health habits, careful grooming and proper diet. Provide situations where members can show skill and grace. Encourage groups that are social and recreational. Allow creativity in projects and activities. Set good examples for youngsters through your health habits, dress and attitude toward life. Help children develop and share their individual talents through non-competitive and non-threatening activities. Show and tell youth that it is okay to feel good about their work, it is okay to say good things about themselves, but it is not okay to hurt or make fun of others in order to make themselves look good. Allow freedom of movement with proper adult supervision.

14-, 15- and 16-year-olds

Physical. Boys are in a period of growth spurts and voice deepens. Girls have usually achieved maximum growth. Menstruation is well established. Pimples are a common problem.

Intellectual. Risk-taking is common as teen tries to prove they are fearless, powerful or sexy. Teens begin to respond to life with full developed mental capabilities.

Emotional. Indulge in fads, language, music and dance of the day (i.e., “If I don't dress, talk or look like my parents, I am really separate from them”). Working on life goals and how others see them.

Social. Strong “peer” group allegiance. They are likely to be critical, argumentative and unsure. In disagreements, blames self and parents. Friends seem more important than parents. Friends provide support. Need for adolescent to achieve emotional separation from parents.

Implications for Leaders:

Begin reinforcing respect for the rules of society; taking responsibility for personal actions; paying consequences if rules are broken; and using leisure time in more productive ways, such as helping others. Engage in conversations about college plans or job interests. Provide career guidance and encourage them to talk with parents and other trusted adults about their plans. Remind youth that peer pressure comes in many forms and avoiding negative peer pressure can keep them out of trouble. Be a good listener when youth come to you with problems or concerns. Avoid asking probing questions and keep unsolicited advice to yourself.

17-year-olds to late adolescence

Physical. Reaches adult sleep patterns. All permanent teeth except wisdom teeth. Physical growth completed. Sexual maturity reached.

Intellectual. Principal growth task is to become a competent, worthwhile and independent adult.

Emotional. Working on *intimacy*. Can share intimate relations with other friends or sex partners. Can relate to others in an intimate way.

Social. Further emancipation and assumption of adult roles. Severs ties with family; may want to move out.

Implications for Leaders:

It is important to provide young adults with wholesome activities in mixed groups. This is a time when young people begin to assume adult roles and begin life-long plans. These young people will be graduating from high school, going to college, entering the work force or getting married. Significant adults, those with whom they feel a special bond, are often looked to for counseling and guidance as they prepare for life goals.

Each Person is Unique

As you work with youth, it is important that you learn as much as you can about them individually and collectively. Each young person in your group is a unique individual with special needs, interests and abilities. Learn what these are. Get acquainted with the home environment. Observe what each says and does and how he or she gets along with peers. Encourage youth to express their feelings, then listen to what they tell you. If behavior is disturbing, make an effort to understand the causes. Look for the problem each is facing, then try to help solve it.

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