



Volunteer Learning Modules: Working with Youth Part 1

Overview

This module provides volunteers with knowledge around the topics of ages and stages, positive youth development, and setting boundaries.

Section 1: Ages and Stages

Children and youth develop at their own pace which means they don't all reach the same developmental stage, or the same maturity level, at the same age. Experts often group the developmental characteristics of children and youth into these four major categories:

- **Physical development** is characterized by patterns of physical growth and maturation. Physical changes can be difficult for some young people to handle, particularly if they don't understand what is happening to them. Young people who mature physically before or after the majority of their peers are often teased.
- **Cognitive development** includes thinking, problem solving, memory, and attention. The capacity to develop cognitively changes over time. Cognitive development involves increasing one's ability to reason and use skills to make independent decisions. Young people have to make many choices every day. Depending on their cognitive development level, young people may find it hard to see the whole picture when making decisions.
- **Emotional development** is the expression of one's feelings about self, other people, and things. Young people often respond emotionally to their surroundings and are still learning how to express their feelings. Older teens often look like adults, but their emotional maturity is still developing.
- **Social development** involves learning how to relate to others. Adult volunteers can be great resources to young people who are learning how to respond to others and interact in social situations.

Resources:

- Ages & Stages Chart: https://train.msue.msu.edu/vls/working-with-youth/story_content/external_files/Ages%20and%20Stages%20Chart.pdf
- 6- to 8-year-olds: Ages and stages of youth development: https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/6_to_8_year_olds_ages_and_stages_of_youth_development
- 9-11 year olds: Ages and stages of youth development: https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/9_to_11_year_olds_ages_and_stages_of_youth_development
- 12-14 year olds: Ages and stages of youth development: https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/12_to_14_year_olds_ages_and_stages_of_youth_development
- 15-17 year olds: Ages and stages of youth development: https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/15_to_17_year_olds_ages_and_stages_of_youth_development
- 18-19 year olds: Ages and stages of youth development: https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/18_to_19_year_olds_ages_and_stages_of_youth_development

To contact an expert in your area, visit extension.msu.edu/experts or call 888-MSUE4MI (888-678-3464)

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Section 2: Positive Youth Development

Positive youth development is the ongoing process of building young people's assets and strengths through their social, emotional, cognitive (thinking), physical, and moral development. Volunteers who know and understand the principles of positive youth development are more likely to help the young people they work with develop the skills that will allow those young people to thrive. Positive youth development is an important concept to understand when working with young people. It puts the focus on building the positive assets of young people instead of on trying to fix the deficits or negatives of young people (Lerner, Lerner, & Phelps, 2008). Concentrating on a young person's positive attributes is much more effective than trying to change what we perceive to be wrong with them. Positive youth development builds on the Five C's of youth development: competence, confidence, connection, character, and compassion (Lerner, 2004). Adults who volunteer with youth programs such as 4-H will recognize a close connection between the Five C's and the objectives of most youth programs.

Resources:

- Lerner, R. M. (2004). *Liberty: Thriving and civic engagement among America's youth*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lerner, R. M., Lerner, J. V., & Phelps, E. (2008). *Waves of the future: The first five years of the 4-H study of positive youth development*. Medford, MA: Tufts University, Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development. Retrieved from <https://ucanr.edu/sites/UC4-H/files/13699.pdf>
- Roehlkepartain, E. C., Pekel, K., Syvertsen, A. K., Sethi, J., Sullivan, T. K., & Scales, P. C. (2017). *Relationships first: Creating connections that help young people thrive*. Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.search-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2017-Relationships-First-final.pdf>
- Zarrett, N., & Lerner, R. M. (2008). Ways to promote the positive development of children and youth. *Child Trends Research-to-Results Brief* (Publication 2008-11). Retrieved from <https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/2008-11PositiveYouthDev.pdf>
- Gaining the Respect of Young People Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EttfSBD7cXk&feature=youtu.be>
- Healthy Risk-Taking Video: <https://youtu.be/bUu-rCCPCA0>
- Helping Youth Make Decisions Video: <https://youtu.be/BGiX-h33bvg>

Section 3: Setting Boundaries

Setting boundaries is healthy for you and the people around you. Boundaries provide structure to your relationships. By setting and maintaining healthy boundaries, you will avoid the following:

- Burning out prematurely
- Feeling responsible for more than is really the case
- Feeling used, disrespected, and taken advantage of
- Developing a victim mentality
- Feeling like you can't say no to any request
- Having youth and parents become overly dependent on you
- Blaming
- Developing one-sided relationships with no give and take



For additional information, visit extension.msu.edu

Resources:

- Setting Boundaries Resource: https://train.msue.msu.edu/vls/working-with-youth/story_content/external_files/Setting%20Boundaries.pdf

Support

If staff, volunteer applicants, or current volunteers need additional assistance with learning modules they should contact a Volunteer Excellence Support Team (VEST) member or e-mail msue.msuvol@msu.edu using the subject "Learning Module Assistance Needed."