

## Views from VanDeWalle

Brandy VanDeWalle, Extension Educator in Fillmore County

March 29, 2023

### Helping Youth Thrive with Positive Emotions

Since the start of the COVID pandemic, studies have shown that youth across the country have shown an increase of depressive symptoms, anxious feelings, and habits of suppressing powerful emotions. One way to counterbalance the changes in youth lives is to get them involved in positive youth development activities like 4-H. Research shows that when youth participate in high quality positive youth development programs like 4-H they are more likely to thrive and achieve important developmental outcomes such as connection with others, personal responsibility, and a positive academic attitude.

Research also shows that today's youth require a greater opportunity to develop reappraisal skills to help them navigate strong emotions. 4-H Youth Development programs are aiding in this by normalizing conversations about feelings and supporting feelings as valid, pointing out other sides to a situation and introducing different perspectives, and encouraging struggling youth to focus on emotional management and positive expression. Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence*, has stated, "If you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can't have empathy and effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far."

To create opportunities for youth and families to feel more connected to the communities around them and grow as individuals, Nebraska 4-H is making efforts to provide education about making healthy and safe decisions – which includes positive emotionality! Positive emotionality is the ability to control positive moods and emotions and can be a preventative factor in blocking out certain types of mental illness. Often, attention and receptivity are enhanced when positive emotionality is present. All these things lead to helping youth thrive. Through programs that have a larger focus on mental health and mindfulness programming, youth will have greater opportunities to grow in their ability to be positive, optimistic, and manage emotions.

Across the nation youth are thriving through positive emotionality. Here are some applicable ways you can encourage youth in your circle of influence to thrive through positive emotionality, too:

- Set clear expectations for expressing emotions during 4-H Club meetings or events.
- Encourage youth to talk about their feelings when they try to suppress them.
- Create a space that teaches youth that all feelings are valid.
- Set an example to show youth that everyone needs to learn to manage their emotions effectively.

To learn more about positive emotionality and the work that is being done to help youth thrive, visit <https://helping-youth-thrive.extension.org>.

*Written by Tayler Goertz Wickham, Extension Educator*