



Views from VanDeWalle

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Sportsmanship & Youth Development

Webster's Third International Dictionary defines sportsmanship as "conduct becoming to an individual involving fair and honest competition, courteous relations and graceful acceptance of results". Sportsmanship starts with parents teaching their youth how to accept a win or a loss, although in the 4-H youth development program, even if the youth receives a red ribbon, nothing is lost as long as some basic knowledge and skills were gained. Too often in our society we focus on the tangible results of a ribbon or trophy and don't think about the process that youth went through to achieve the end results and what was learned from that process.

I often use the example that as a youth, I'll never forget receiving a red ribbon for a market heifer; I was disappointed, but will never forget my dad asking me, what the judge said in the comments. After we talked it over, I realized his reasoning and was able to understand the type of animal I should select the following year. That was a lesson I'll never forget. My parents instilled the value of hard work into my sister and I and any animal we showed we bought with our own money to build a small cow/calf herd or they came from our own herd. We rarely had the award-winning animal and were extremely excited to even receive a purple ribbon. The learning that occurred, memories and fun we had were just as valuable than if we would have received a trophy or plaque.

For these reasons, it is really rewarding to work with youth who are happy with any ribbon placing- white, red, blue or purple. It really is just one person's opinion on one particular day! The 4-H Program focuses on providing positive youth development and developing young people as future leaders. A ribbon or plaque placing does not achieve this; rather it is the process, skills and effort that went into the project. It is also important to mention that the entire 4-H program extends beyond the county fair and is done through educational workshops, career portfolios, leadership experiences and much more and is a year-round program.

Positive Youth Development

National 4-H reminds us that there are four critical components of a successful learning experience which include a sense of belonging, independence, mastery and generosity. During county fair and all 4-H programming, it is important that youth experience these.

Belonging

Youth need to know they are cared about by others and feel a sense of connection to others in the group. As the facilitator, it is important to provide youth the opportunity to feel physically and emotionally safe while actively participating in a group. Create a safe and inclusive environment and foster a positive relationship with youth learners. Use discussion questions that encourage youth to learn from each other, synthesize and use ideas collaboratively.

Independence

Youth need to know that they are able to influence people and events through decision-making and action. They learn to better understand themselves and become independent thinkers. Throughout each curriculum, youth are given opportunities to develop and reflect upon thoughts and responses to the challenges, explorations, and investigations. Youth begin to understand that they are able to act as change agents with confidence and competence as a result of their learning.

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In order to develop self-confidence youth need to feel and believe they are capable and they must experience success at solving problems and meeting challenges. Youth need a breadth and depth of topics that allow them to pursue their own interests. Introduce youth to expert knowledge and guide them toward their own sense of mastery and accomplishment.

Generosity

Youth need to feel their lives have meaning and purpose. Throughout each curriculum, youth are encouraged to broaden their perspectives, find relevance in the topic area and bring ideas back to their community.

Adapted from 4-H Essential Elements of 4-H Youth Development, Dr. Cathann Kress, 2004.