

Working with Youth Basic Food Safety Training for Master Food Volunteers

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ABSTRACT

Increased awareness of the importance of maintaining good health, physical activity, and proper nutrition is needed by people of all ages in the United States. The need for this type of educational programming is even greater for youth populations who are constantly growing and developing. Virginia Cooperative Extension's Master Food Volunteer and 4-H Youth Development programs make the perfect partnership for reaching youth populations in health education. The Master Food Volunteer training program currently does not include training for volunteers on how to work with youth populations. Research shows that quality volunteer training is essential for volunteer program impact and longevity. The purpose of this project is to create "working with youth" training resources for the Master Food Volunteer training program. The project developed a *Working with Youth* chapter for the Master Food Volunteer training notebook and an online module for the Canvas training website. The focus of the training resources is on the essential elements of youth development, understanding children, tips for working with youth populations, and potential ideas for health-related programming and partnerships. These resources are designed to be utilized by Master Food Volunteers and Virginia Cooperative Extension employees working with these volunteers. It is the goal of this project that increased youth food safety, nutrition, and health related programming will take place thus improving the overall health of the communities served.

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Introduction

Background and Setting

Volunteers are essential to the success of communities. Active volunteer organizations within a community encourage citizens to become more involved, build connected and stronger communities, and improve the overall health of communities (O'Neil et al., 2021). Throughout history, Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) has relied on volunteers to enhance program outreach and impact. Volunteers assist extension agents in programming efforts to expand knowledge of subject matter of interest. VCE's Master Food Volunteer (MFV) program keeps citizens across the commonwealth educated with the most up-to-date, research-based knowledge of nutrition, food safety, physical activity, and other health related topics (Virginia Cooperative Extension, n.d.). These volunteers complete a rigorous training program consisting of at least 30 hours of initial training with continuous training requirements of at least 5 hours each year following (Chase, 2017).

The MFV training program consists of an in-depth training notebook and an online Canvas website. Although the training is comprised of a variety of valuable lessons, it was found to be deficient in training its volunteers in working with youth. Dr. Melissa Chase, former VCE MFV State Coordinator, reached out to VCE 4-H Youth Development Agent and Food Safety and Biosecurity Online Master of Agriculture and Life Sciences student, Hannah Parker, to discuss training needs of the MFV program. In discussions, a plan was established to create a *Working with Youth* training chapter and online training module for the MFV training program. These training needs and project plans were further supported in later discussions with Dr. Lester Schonberger, VCE Food Safety Extension Specialist. Creation of "working with youth" training

resources will provide volunteers the training and knowledge needed to more confidently and effectively conduct youth nutrition, food safety, and health related programming. The need for health programming is supported when reviewing obesity prevalence data across the commonwealth. The percentage of adult obesity in Virginia has steadily increased over the years, with 28% prevalence in 2015, 30% prevalence in 2020, and 32% prevalence in 2023 (University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, 2023). With the steady rise of the prevalence of obesity in adults across the commonwealth, there is an increased risk for more adults in Virginia to get serious diseases and health conditions (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). MFV health related educational programming and outreach is needed now more than ever. Because children are at a time of critical growth and development, it is essential that youth are included in education outreach of MFVs.

Statement of the Problem

VCE's MFV training program needs training resources for educating their volunteers to effectively work with youth populations. Lack of appropriate working with youth volunteer training, leads to volunteers not conducting youth programming (due to lack of knowledge or comfort), volunteers not meeting youth learning needs (ineffective programming), and/or leads to risk management and youth safety concerns (due to lack of proper program planning for youth needs). If these volunteers are not adequately trained to work with youth, they may miss out on food safety, nutrition, and health related educational programming that could benefit their healthy development. A short-term goal of the project is to first create "working with youth" training materials for the MFV training program. Adequate training of MFVs is needed for these volunteers to comfortably, confidently, and efficiently work with youth. Training will also help increase partnership opportunities between the MFV program and VCE's 4-H youth

development program. A mid-term goal is for VCE to provide youth increased food safety, nutrition, and health related educational opportunities in a safe environment that meets their learning needs. Long-term, it is the goal of the program to decrease rates of chronic disease and obesity, as well as improve overall health and quality of life for the residents of the communities served with this volunteer program.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the project is to create training resources for MFVs, and those agents working with these volunteers, to ensure they have the training needed to be better prepared for working with youth in food safety, nutrition, and health education settings. After completion of the project, training resources developed will be accessible to these audiences on the MFV Canvas training website, and as a chapter of the MFV Notebook. These resources will be available and distributed throughout Extension as needed. This content will be incorporated into the mandatory training required for MFVs. Inclusion of this information will enhance the current MFV training program and will open opportunities for enhanced partnerships between MFVs and VCE's 4-H Youth Development program, thus reaching increased numbers of youth in healthy living programming. The overall goal is for volunteers to be trained adequately so increased food safety, nutrition, and health education programming can occur with youth audiences.

Project Objectives

The project objectives are as follows:

- 1) Review the current MFV training program.
- 2) Determine training needs to improve the MFV training program in regards to working with youth.

- 3) Survey VCE employees that work with or have the potential to work with MFVs to examine current state of the program and to determine if a “working with youth” training is needed.
- 4) Develop “working with youth” training resources for MFVs and those VCE employees working with MFVs.

The overall objective of this project was to lay the foundation for the creation of “working with youth” training materials for the MFV program.

Review of Literature

Master Food Volunteer Program

Volunteers are critical to the mission of VCE. Without volunteers, extension agents would not be able to reach as many youth and adults across the commonwealth. According to the Journal of Extension, master volunteer programs were established in the United States during the 1960’s (Wolford et al., 2001). Extension master volunteer programs provide formal, in-depth training so that volunteers build expertise in subject matter, build a strong program foundation, and share knowledge learned through implementation of high-quality programs within the locality. The MFV program is an expansion of VCE’s family and consumer sciences program. The purpose of MFVs is to expand extension’s food, nutrition, food safety, and health programming to reach more families across Virginia with up-to-date, research-based information (Schonberger, 2022; Virginia Cooperative Extension, n.d.). In addition to assisting extension agents with educational programming, master volunteers help answer questions from community members and make efforts to reach new audiences within the community in which they serve (Chase, 2017). MFVs must complete a rigorous training program prior to becoming certified as a master volunteer. The training program consists of 30 hours of initial training and then 30 hours

of mandatory volunteer hours within year one after completing initial training requirements (Virginia Cooperative Extension, n.d.). After MFVs succeed at earning necessary hours in year one, all future years they will be required to volunteer a total of 15 hours and receive 5 hours of training (Chase, 2017). After being trained, MFVs are allowed to teach a variety of subject related classes, work with youth and adults, conduct cooking demonstrations, lead educational displays, write lesson plans, judge foods at contests, and manage volunteer programs (Chase, 2017). Overall, these volunteers assist in making VCE's outreach more efficient and impactful.

The MFV training program is widespread and covers a range of topic areas that are beneficial for the volunteer's knowledge. The educational topics include 1) history of MFVs, 2) risk management, 3) nutrition, 4) dietary guidelines, 5) food safety, 6) preparing foods / cooking techniques, 7) meal planning, 8) food groups, 9) seasoning, 10) knife safety, 11) allergens, 12) local foods, 13) physical activity, and 14) working with diverse groups (Chase, 2017). Each of these topics are discussed in detail as chapters found in the MFV training notebook. When reviewing the volunteer training notebook, Canvas training website, and meeting with the coordinators of the MFV program, "working with youth" was identified as a way to improve and expand the program.

Need for Youth Nutrition, Health Wellness, and Food Safety Educational Programming

Increased awareness of the importance of maintaining good health, physical activity, and proper nutrition is needed by people of all ages in the United States. Physical inactivity and obesity are two of the largest health concerns affecting the nation. Currently, more than 1 in 3 American adults are obese, 1 in 3 are overweight, and only half of adults meet their daily physical activity requirements needed to help reduce and prevent chronic disease (American Cancer Society, 2023; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Unfortunately, similar

statistics exist for youth. Youth obesity among children and teens impacts 1 in 5 youth across the United States (American Cancer Society, 2023; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023a). Technology, social media, entertainment, modern transport, busy work and family schedules, and convenient fast food restaurants all impact human health. The ease of modern society has led to Americans becoming less active and less aware of healthy lifestyle choices.

Increased trends in youth being overweight and obese is coupled with an increased prevalence of youth heart disease, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, stroke, asthma, sleep apnea, type 2 diabetes, liver disease, muscle and joint problems, anxiety, depression, and social and psychological programs (American Cancer Society, 2023). All of these diseases have both physical and economic impacts on the individual and society as a whole. It is imperative that youth and adults are educated on the importance of proper nutrition, healthy eating habits, and physical activity so they can best protect their health from chronic disease. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle will improve overall health status, quality of life, and community. As stated in the *U.S. Health in International Perspective: Shorter Lives, Poorer Health* article, “early life is a critical developmental period that can shape health development trajectories throughout life” (Woolf & Aron, 2013). If youth are not included in health education, they will continue on the trajectory of living an unhealthy lifestyle that will lead to long-term negative health effects with increased risk of poor health and diseases throughout life.

In addition to the need for youth nutrition and health wellness education, food safety education is of equal importance. Foodborne illness impacts the lives of many people across the globe. The CDC estimates that 48 million become sick, 128,000 hospitalizations, and 3,000 deaths occur yearly due to foodborne pathogens (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023b). Financial impacts of foodborne illness exist as well. According to the United States

Department of Agriculture, it is projected that foodborne illnesses cost the country more than \$15.6 billion each year (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023c). However, due to improper diagnosis and lack of reporting to the CDC, it is believed that actual effects of foodborne illnesses may be higher (Painter et al., 2013).

The risk for certain foodborne illnesses has been seen to be more prevalent in youth populations. For example, salmonellosis, a food poisoning caused by infection of the bacteria *Salmonella*, has the highest risk of affecting children than any other demographic (Buzby, 2001; Guion et al., 2004). This illness is typically transmitted when humans consume foods contaminated with animal feces. Research shows that youth overall have “less than optimal levels of food safety knowledge and safe food handling best practices,” thus causing them to be more prone to mishandle foods (Byrd-Bredbenner et al., 2007; Diehl et al., 2010). Mishandling of foods is one of the main causes of foodborne illness. Because children’s immune systems are not fully developed and because children typically have a lower body weight than adults, only a small amount of pathogen is needed to cause illness in children compared to adults (Buzby, 2001; Guion et al., 2004).

Although youth are often times overlooked when it comes to food safety education and program topics, it is of critical need for youth populations. Many young people now have fewer opportunities to learn about food safety practices. Research shows that youth in today’s society have decreased food safety learning opportunities due to schools removing home economics classes, parents having busy work schedules, and American diets consisting mostly of convenient pre-made, fast-food options (Byrd-Bredbenner et al., 2007). Although youth food safety learning opportunities are limited, a study conducted by the University of Florida’s 4-H program discovered that a majority of youth were interested and willing to learn more about food safety.

Out of 103 youth surveyed, 57% of youth stated yes and 36% stated that they may be interested in learning more about food safety (Diehl et al., 2010). This data suggests that youth are interested in food safety topics, but just are not being offered opportunities to learn.

Teaching proper hygiene habits and food-handling practices when a child is young will have an affect for a lifetime (Guion et al., 2004). Research shows that habits are typically formed in early life. This is why it is important for proper education to start early in a child's life so that correct hygiene and handling of foods becomes common practice. Educating older teens in food safety education is of even greater importance due to this age group typically earning their first jobs in the food industry or in babysitting and caring for younger youth (Diehl et al., 2010; Guion et al., 2004, Byrd-Bredbenner et al., 2007). In these roles, teens are not only handling foods for themselves, but for those they are serving or caring for in their jobs. This means that food safety education for youth is not only significant for the child, but is of potentially greater importance for the health of community and the individuals the teens are caring for (Byrd-Bredbenner et al., 2007).

Positive Youth Development and 4-H

Rapid growth and changes occur throughout the childhood years. The term "adolescence" is defined as the period of time in youth development that consists of rapid changes that occur as a young person is developing into an adult (Crosnoe & Johnson, 2011). This period of development is often associated as the teenage years. Research in the field of adolescence primarily began in 1904 under the leadership of Stanley Hall, the first president of the American Psychological Association (Crosnoe & Johnson, 2011; Lerner & Lerner, 2013). Early researchers of adolescence viewed the period of development negatively, primarily focusing on what youth lacked compared to adults (Lerner & Lerner, 2013; Positive Coaching Alliance, 2015). For

decades, researchers and society as a whole believed adolescents were inherently going to cause problems or had problems that needed to be managed. This early misconception of adolescence caused parents, teachers, and youth development workers to focus on what youth should avoid, overlooking the positive capabilities of teenagers (Bowers et al., 2010).

Increased research, knowledge, and understanding led to a new perspective of adolescent development: Positive Youth Development (PYD). The PYD perspective was established in the early 1990s, encouraging researchers and leaders to shift their negative viewpoint to a more positive viewpoint, focusing on youth strengths and the positive outcomes that are desired for youth to develop (Bowers et al., 2010; Lerner & Lerner, 2013). The establishment of this new viewpoint of PYD revolutionized the way youth organizations, parents, and leaders worked with youth. The PYD framework is an intentional process that helps youth discover their strengths and engages them in their communities. There are five key characteristics of PYD that should be encouraged throughout the youth development process. These positive outcomes are known as the Five C's of PYD: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring (Bowers et al., 2010; Lerner & Lerner, 2013; Positive Coaching Alliance, 2015). These characteristics focus on teaching youth to view their actions and strengths in a positive manner (Competence), to increase their (Confidence) by practicing positive self-worth, to create positive relationships with others (Connection), to practice respect and integrity (Character), and to show a sense of empathy and sympathy for others by (Caring) (Lerner & Lerner, 2013; Bowers et al., 2010).

All youth have strengths and the ability to have each of the Five C's of PYD. A quality youth development program founded on the principals of PYD is the United States Department of Agriculture's 4-H Youth Development program. 4-H was first established in 1902 and now impacts nearly six million youth across the country, making it America's largest youth

development organization (National 4-H Council, 2023). 4-H is a part of the Cooperative Extension network, connecting local 4-H programs directly to the land-grant universities found in each state. 4-H is a national program that can be found in almost every locality across the nation. In 4-H, all youth are believed to have potential and are empowered to learn valuable life skills through hands-on experiential learning opportunities taught by caring adult mentors (National 4-H Council, 2023). Youth are encouraged to find their passions in 4-H and to use the skills they learn to teach others through leadership opportunities. The three strategies that make 4-H most effective as a youth development program is its focus on 1) Establishing positive and sustained relationships between adults and youth, 2) Teaching life skills as the focus of 4-H activities, and 3) Providing opportunities for youth to showcase learned skills as leaders in their community (Lerner & Lerner, 2013; PRYDE, 2017).

In order for youth to confidently showcase their strengths and achieve positive outcomes, their basic needs must first be met. 4-H identifies the four basic developmental needs of youth as 1) Belonging, 2) Mastery, 3) Independence, and 4) Generosity (Ivey & Mehlberg, 2006). All 4-H programs strive to meet these basic needs of youth. To help 4-H volunteers and leaders address these youth needs, the National 4-H Impact Design Implementation Team established eight essential elements that comprise 4-H PYD (National Institute of Food and Agriculture, 2023). The eight essential elements of 4-H provide youth “1) Positive relationships with caring adults, 2) A safe environment, 3) An inclusive environment, 4) Engagement in learning, 5) Opportunity for mastery, 6) Opportunity to see oneself as an active participant in the future, 7) Opportunity for self-determination, and 8) Opportunity to value and practice service for others” (Samuel & Rose, 2011). Additionally, it is beneficial for 4-H professionals and volunteers to familiarize themselves with a brief understanding of the ages and stages of youth development in order to

implement programs that incorporate these essential elements to meet the needs of their target youth audiences (Meadows, 2001). The incorporation of these essential elements into all programming set 4-H apart from other youth serving organizations.

PYD research was limited in the early 2000s. At this time, the true impact of PYD on youth outcomes was unknown. A team of researchers at the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development at Tufts University partnered with land-grant university faculty across the nation to conduct a longitudinal 4-H study of PYD (Lerner & Lerner, 2013). The purpose of the study was to further the understanding of PYD and to see if youth programs, such as 4-H, impacted positive outcomes in youth. The *4-H Study of PYD* took place from 2002-2010 examining over 7,000 diverse youth develop over time beginning in the 5th grade and ending in the 12th grade (Lerner et al., 2005, Lerner & Lerner, 2013). Increased knowledge of PYD and youth development program's impact on PYD was obtained. It was discovered in the study that quality youth development programs, such as 4-H, that focus on "skill-building, meaningful youth leadership opportunities, and long-term caring adult relationships," led to the positive youth outcomes of "competence, caring, character, confidence, and connection" (Lerner & Lerner, 2013; Lerner et al., 2005; PRYDE, 2017). Additionally, it was discovered that 4-H youth programs not only increased positive outcomes of the Five C's of PYD among its youth, but it also encouraged its 4-H youth to participate in a 6th C of PYD, Contribution, giving back to the community (Lerner & Lerner, 2013). The 4-H longitudinal study provided the data needed to support the connection of PYD with the Five C's and to support 4-H youth development's positive role in impacting youth. Overall, the study determined that 4-H youth were approximately four times more likely to make contributions to their communities and two times more likely to be civically active (Lerner & Lerner, 2013). This data suggests targeting youth

through 4-H programming is beneficial for PYD of the youth and for potentially improving communities as a whole.

Need for Training Volunteers Working with Youth

Volunteers are essential to VCE and youth programming efforts. Different volunteer categories require varying training needs. All VCE volunteers working with youth must be trained appropriately and follow Virginia 4-H guidelines prior to conducting youth programming. It is essential for volunteers working with youth to be trained to ensure risk management procedures are being followed and the safety of youth is of top priority (Grossman & Furano, 1999). Most extension volunteers come to the program enthusiastic and ready to help, but often times are not pre-trained and have little to no experience to prepare them for their role (Nagy, n.d.). It is unwise for organizations to expect volunteers to be able to perform their job duties without guidance. Formal training is needed for volunteers working with youth. As the literature suggests, it is not very easy and sometimes is frustrating for an adult and a child to form a positive mentoring and learning relationship with each other, especially when volunteers are not trained (Grossman & Furano, 1999). Volunteers who are trained for the job have a better understanding of their role and complete job responsibilities more efficiently (Fox et al., 2009). Untrained volunteers can easily become overwhelmed and lose track of attention to the importance of their work. Years of research shows that most adults that are tasked with working with youth and do not receive some sort of training before or during their volunteer role will not last in their role (Grossman & Furano, 1999). Effective volunteer training allows volunteers to gain set skills, receive rewards and recognitions, and experience social affiliation with other volunteers and the group for which they are volunteering for (VanWinkle, 2002). Training received early in the volunteer's involvement in the organization will enhance the volunteer's

understanding of the program's goals and their role in helping the organization achieve those goals. Early training leads to greater effectiveness of the volunteer (Grossman & Furano, 1999).

Louisiana State University AgCenter's state 4-H program conducted a study of volunteer participation across a two-year period. A total of 303 volunteers were evaluated after participating in a total of 5 hours of interactive and relevant educational training and networking opportunities at area 4-H volunteer trainings offered across the state. Out of the 303 trained volunteers, 96% stated that they broadened knowledge of new 4-H projects, 93% increased knowledge of youth development, 95% increased personal development by developing skills as a volunteer, 96% felt their local program would be enhanced by the training, and 97% stated that they were energized and motivated to expand their role within the 4-H volunteer program (Fox et al., 2009). Additionally, the study found that over half of the volunteers planned to utilize and share information gained at the trainings with their local communities. A total of 66% of the trained volunteers stated that they planned to use information learned to manage the local 4-H program better and 60% stated that they planned to share information learned with their fellow volunteers at the local level (Fox et al., 2009). This study shows that quality training of volunteers can have a positive ripple effect on the program, other volunteers that are connected to the trained volunteer, and the overall sustainability of the program. The study found that after all volunteer trainings were completed, it was averaged that each volunteer reached 115 youth and 18 adults annually, while averaging a total of approximately 8 hours of volunteer time each month (Fox et al., 2009). This data suggests that quality training of volunteers leads to improved overall impact of program volunteers.

Social connection and a feeling of belonging is of importance when managing volunteers. When volunteers connect with others through community, receive recognition, and feel confident

in the subject matter they are volunteering in, volunteers are more likely to enjoy their participation as a volunteer, remain involved in the program, and leave a larger impact on the people they are serving (VanWinkle, 2002; Acha, n.d.). As suggested in the *Virginia 4-H Basic Volunteer Orientation Guide*, it is important to focus on a “TEAM” approach for volunteer programs. When individuals have a network of at least 2-3 other volunteers to interact and share responsibilities with, the volunteers have a social connection with others in which they can ask questions, they do not get overworked, and are able to provide a larger impact on the populations they are serving (Meadows et al., 2001).

Volunteer training does not only impact the effectiveness of the volunteer, but also the program’s overall sustainability. Research shows that volunteers participating in job orientation and an effective training program increase the program’s overall sustainability through positively impacting volunteer retention (Fox et al., 2009). On the contrary, a lack of efficient volunteer training leads to high turnover rates for volunteers and less overall program impact (Fox et al., 2009). As stated by Jana Magruder, director of LifeWay Kids, in her video discussion titled, *How to Train and Retain Volunteers*, “A well trained volunteer, is a retained volunteer” (LifeWay, 2019). Due to the nature of working with youth, it is essential that volunteers are well trained and retained so that youth-adult partnerships can develop within the program and gain trust to overall improve program impact. It takes time to build relationships, especially youth-adult relationships. This is why it is vital for organizations to invest in quality training of their volunteers for the sustainability of their programs.

Literary Review Conclusions and Connections

Based on the results of the literary review, there is a clear need for PYD educational programs focused on nutrition, health wellness, and food safety, as well as a need for volunteers

working with youth to be trained. VCE's MFV program in partnership with the 4-H Youth Development program is a great avenue to address these needs. Although MFVs are a great resource to meet these needs, the program lacks training resources to adequately equip volunteers to work with youth. Because of this void, the overall objective of this project is to create "working with youth" training resources for the MFV training program so these volunteers are equipped with the resources needed to assist and manage increased numbers of youth health educational programs within their communities. Based on the literature review, when volunteers are presented with quality training, they are more likely to become more motivated, more impactful, and have increased longevity in the program. This project is needed to enhance the MFV training program, to improve the health of local communities, to create sustainable partnerships between the MFV Program and 4-H Youth Development, and to advance the overall mission of VCE.

Project Design and Methodology

The need for this project arose after in-depth discussions with the former and current VCE MFV State Coordinators, Drs. Melissa Chase and Lester Schonberger. Both coordinators agreed that the MFV training program needed "working with youth" training resources. After our discussions, an extensive review of the current MFV training notebook and online Canvas site was conducted. A brief survey, as seen in Appendix A, consisting of seven questions was created and distributed via email to 85 VCE employees across the state that were identified as having experience with, or potential involvement in the MFV program. The primary target audience of the survey was Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Extension Agents. This was determined since the MFV program was created as an expansion of the FCS program and because MFVs are most commonly supervised by FCS agents. Unit Coordinators were included in the target

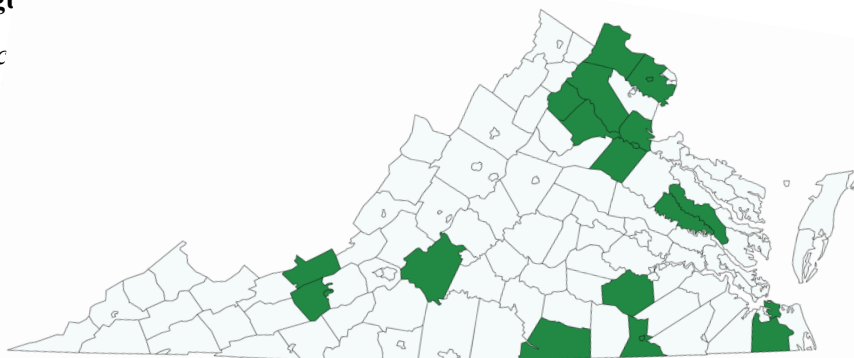
audience for all localities that did not have an FCS agent or program assistant. FCS agents that serve multiple localities across the commonwealth were asked to complete the survey for each of their localities. A list of target employees (FCS and/or Unit Coordinators) from each locality across Virginia was created from the VCE Local Offices webpage listing staff contacts. A representative from every extension locality was contacted to complete the survey. The survey focused on learning more about the current status of each locality’s MFV program and whether or not the program would be interested in youth partnership opportunities. As a result of the discussions, research findings, and survey results, a “Working with Youth” training module and chapter were created using research-based 4-H Youth Development sources. The chapter will be published in the VCE MFV training notebook and the module will be housed on the MFV Canvas training site to be utilized by extension agents, staff and volunteers.

Survey Results

A brief survey (Appendix A) consisting of seven questions was distributed to 85 VCE employees identified as having experience with, or potential interest in the MFV program. There was a 20% survey response, representing 17 localities across Virginia, as noted in Figure 1. Responses, representing all five of VCE’s districts, including rural and urban localities, were received.

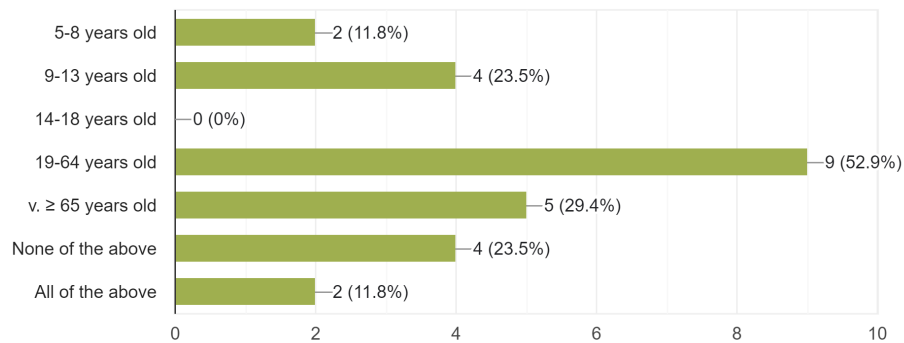
Fig 1

Locality



The distribution of volunteers varied greatly across the state. Some localities reported having no volunteers, and one locality in northern Virginia reported having as many as 20 volunteers. Of the responses collected, most localities averaged having 4 active volunteers in their MFV program. Most survey respondents (52.9%) conducted programs primarily with adults ages 19-64, with the second largest category being seniors ages ≥ 65 years older (29.4%). Youth ages 5-8 and teens ages 14-18 were surprisingly the least targeted populations for MFVs.

Figure 2. *Primary Age Groups Master Food Volunteers Work with As Reported in Survey Results*



When asked if there was a need for MFVs to work with youth in their locality, 100% of respondents stated yes, with 58.8% suggesting that after-school youth cooking classes were of the greatest need, and 47.1% suggesting a need for the 4-H Food Challenge program and food demonstrations for youth, as seen in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3. *Potential Master Food Volunteer Interest in Working with Youth in Localities*



Survey respondents provided detail on specific training resources needed to prepare MFVs for working with youth. Training needs included:

- 1) Risk Management / Working with Youth Training
- 2) Behavior and Classroom Management Skills
- 3) Working with Youth - How to Give Constructive Feedback and Helpful Instructions
- 4) Youth Friendly Recipes for Food Demonstrations

Finally, the last question of the survey asked what barriers kept MFVs from working with youth. Results from this survey question provided excellent ideas for future research projects and curriculum development needs. The main barriers reported were the following:

- 1) Lack of funding (no FCS position or funding to have MFV program)
- 2) Limited number of MFVs / no active MFVs
- 3) Need for research-based structured curriculum designed for youth focused on food safety or health related programming
- 4) Lack of time available by volunteers
- 5) Misbehaved students / students not engaged in activity
- 6) MFVs do not want to work independently
- 7) Belief that youth programs are conducted only by 4-H agent and the 4-H program

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this project was to lay the foundation and create “working with youth” training materials for the MFV training program. An extensive review and survey of the current MFV training program was conducted with two primary training resources created. A “working with youth” training chapter and an online module was created to improve the current MFV training program. The topics selected for the “working with youth” training chapter (4-H PYD,

Essential Elements of Youth Development, Basic Needs of Youth, Life Skills Development, Experiential Learning Model, and Understanding Children) were identified in the literary review as key components of PYD and were thought to be important to include in the training of MFVs. The chapter will be published in the VCE MFV Training Notebook, and the module will be published on the online VCE MFV Canvas training website. It is expected that MFVs will review these resources on their own and further discuss contents of the chapter with their local 4-H Extension Agent. After completing the chapter and module, the MFV will be asked to schedule a meeting with their local 4-H agent for follow-up and further discussion. Resources created through this project will be available to VCE employees and MFVs. If enough interest is available, an in-service training will be provided for employees at the annual VCE Winter Conference in 2025. This training will focus on establishing and improving FCS and 4-H partnership through the MFV program.

Potential limitations of the study may exist and are acknowledged in this section. The primary limitations of the study revolve around the survey that was created and distributed. The first shortcoming of the survey is the target audience selection. FCS employees were the primary target of the survey, with Unit Coordinators being targeted for localities without an FCS presence. Although this target audience was originally thought to be best, since the MFV program is an expansion of the FCS program, it was later determined that this could also lead to considerable limitations of survey results. By targeting only FCS employees, we are potentially creating selection bias. Since the project is focused on providing youth training resources for MFVs, it would have been beneficial to expand our target audience to include both FCS and 4-H employees. Input from experts in the youth development field across the commonwealth could have potentially strengthened survey results. Secondly, the list of FCS and Unit Coordinator

contacts were obtained from the VCE Local Offices webpage of staff contacts. This source of contacts could also serve as a potential limitation to the project if the webpage staff contact lists are not regularly updated to include new hires, vacancies, and transfers. Some employees that should have been targeted with the survey may have not received notice if the VCE webpage was not up-to-date, leading to unplanned sampling bias. The third potential flaw of the survey is how it was distributed. Because the survey was emailed individually to the target population, there is the potential that the email could have gotten overlooked by the individual or could have gone to the individual's spam email folder. It is suggested in the future to distribute surveys via the respective VCE listservs (4-H and FCS). Finally, an overall limitation of the project is time constraint. If given more time, it would be ideal to host a training for VCE employees showcasing the project work to share resources created, pilot resources created across the commonwealth, receive feedback from those that utilized the resources, make revisions and improvements to the resources based on feedback, and create additional resources to improve the training program. Unfortunately, the project did not have enough time to fully address all of the MFV training needs at this time. Future projects expanding upon this project could focus on evaluating the resources created in this project, creating a valuable training opportunity to share MFV resources with VCE employees, or creating additional resources to enhance the MFV training program.

Need for this project primarily arose from discussions with MFV coordinators. Results from the survey provided data to support the need for youth training resources, as well as the need for additional resources for the MFV program. Based on input received from employees and agents from across the commonwealth, there is a need for youth and adult focused research-based curriculum. Future initiatives to expand and improve the MFV program could include the

creation of specific youth food safety, nutrition, and physical activity curriculum that can easily be utilized by agents and volunteers in the field. Additionally, the incorporation of annual trainings for employees and volunteers, focused on new subject matter and the MFV program as a whole, would be beneficial for program growth.

As a result of this project, it is anticipated that an increased number of MFVs will become trained to work with youth, thus increasing 4-H volunteer numbers. Volunteers are expected to increase their overall comfort level and confidence in managing youth programs. It is a goal of this program that by providing training for these volunteers, increased partnerships will arise between VCE's MFV and 4-H programs. In years to come, it is anticipated that increased numbers of youth health related programming will occur with the help of MFVs. With the anticipation of increased numbers of youth and families across the commonwealth positively impacted by extension health-related programming efforts, VCE's mission will continue onward impacting more lives and communities across the commonwealth than ever before.

Acknowledgements

I want to sincerely thank my advisor and committee members for all of their support and guidance throughout this process. I will be forever grateful for all of the support, guidance, and patience shown by Dr. Renee Boyer, Dr. Lester Schonberger, and Dr. Tonya Price during this process. I would like to sincerely thank Virginia Cooperative Extension for the opportunity to continue my education. Finally, I would like to thank my family for all of their support, time and encouragement to finish my degree.

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Appendix A: Master Food Volunteer Program Survey



Master Food Volunteer Program Survey

Please complete this BRIEF survey helping us better support you in your current or future efforts of hosting a Master Food Volunteer Program.

This survey will allow us to best meet the needs of each locality in regards to maintaining, improving, and growing the Master Food Volunteer Program.

Thank you for completing this important survey!
It should not take more than 2 minutes!

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact:

Hannah Parker Wilson
hdp2513@vt.edu
434-637-3225

Please state the locality or localities that you serve (optional)

Your answer _____

Do you have Master Food Volunteers (MFV) in your locality? *

Yes

No

Unsure

Other: _____

If yes, how many active Master Food Volunteers do you have? *

Your answer _____

What age groups do your Master Food Volunteers primarily work with? *

- 5-8 years old
- 9-13 years old
- 14-18 years old
- 19-64 years old
- v. ≥ 65 years old
- All of the above
- None of the above

Could there be a need for your Master Food Volunteers to work with youth in any of the following programs in your locality? (check all that apply) *

- Teen Cuisine Programming
- Youth Cooking Club
- After-school Cooking Classes
- In-school Nutrition Classes
- Partnership with Culinary Arts Program at Local School System
- 4-H Food Challenge Program
- Food Demonstrations for Youth Cooking Workshops / Day Camps
- Youth Food Preservation Workshops
- Judge Youth Food Entries/Competitions at County Fairs or State Level Competitions
- All of the above
- None of the above

What training or resource needs would be helpful in preparing your Master Food Volunteers for working with youth ages 5-18? *

Your answer

What barriers, if any, exist that keep you and your Master Food Volunteers from working with youth ages 5-18? *

Your answer

Comments/Questions:

Your answer




Submit

Clear form

Appendix B: Working with Youth Canvas Training Module Screenshot

View All Pages Publish Edit

Working with Youth



(Greensville/Emporia 4-H Volunteer, Mrs. Dunn, assists students in making an omelet during an afterschool 4-H cooking session at E.W. Wyatt Middle School in Emporia, Virginia.)

Introduction

Welcome to our unit: **Working with Youth**. The content of this unit focuses on understanding the differences between youth ages and stages; understanding the essential elements of positive youth development; teaching tips for working with youth in cooking and food safety programs, and educating the learner about Virginia Cooperative Extension's guidelines for working with youth.

To complete this unit, you will:

- Review the "Working with Youth" MFV chapter PDF; and
- Complete a short quiz

Estimated Time for Completion: 60 minutes

Presenters

Hannah Parker, Extension Agent, 4-H Youth Development

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

1. Understand more about Virginia Cooperative Extension's 4-H Positive Youth Development Program
2. Identify the Essential Elements of Positive Youth Development and the Basic Needs of Youth
3. Learn about the 4-H Life Skills Development Model
4. Learn about the Experiential Learning Model
5. Understand the differences between youth ages and stages
6. Learn tips for working with youth in nutrition, food preparation, food safety, physical activity, health, and wellness programs.
7. Learn Virginia Cooperative Extension's guidelines for working with youth
8. Identify partnership opportunities between the Master Food Volunteer Program and the 4-H Youth Development Program

Training Resources

Below is a link to the MFV Training Notebook, Working with Youth Chapter. Please read this PDF to learn more about working with youth.

[Working with Youth Chapter in MFV Notebook](#) 
[Minimize File Preview](#)

- Home
- Announcements
- Grades
- Syllabus
- Ally Course Accessibility Report
- Microsoft OneDrive
- Top Hat
- Credentials
- Badges
- Zoom
- Course Gallery
- Gradescope
- Assignments
- Modules
- Discussions
- Rubrics
- Quizzes
- Pages
- Files
- Outcomes
- Collaborations
- People
- Settings



Working with Youth

Reviewed and Adapted by
 Hannah Parker, 4-H Extension Agent, Virginia Cooperative Extension
 H. Lester Schanberger, Associate Extension Specialist, Food Science and Technology, Virginia Tech
 Renee Boyer, Extension Specialist, Food Science and Technology, Virginia Tech
 Tonya Price, Extension Specialist, 4-H Youth Development, Virginia Cooperative Extension

notebook

Overview	1
Introduction	1
4-H Youth Development	2
Essential Elements of Youth Development / Basic Needs of Youth	2
Life Skills Development in 4-H	3
Experiential Learning Model	3
Understanding Children: Ages and Stages	4
Tips for Working with Youth in Food Safety and Health Related Programming	5
Virginia Cooperative Extension's Policies and Procedures for Working with Youth	5
Additional Information	7
References	8
Handouts	11

Overview

- On completion of this chapter, the Master Food Volunteer will:
- Be familiar with Virginia Cooperative Extension's 4-H Youth Development program.
 - Identify the four essential elements of positive youth development.
 - Learn how to utilize the Targeting Life Skills and Experiential Learning models to plan effective youth programs.
 - Distinguish the differences seen between youth ages and stages.
 - Learn tips for working with youth in nutrition, food preparation, food safety, physical activity, health, and wellness programs.
 - Be familiar with Virginia Cooperative Extension policies and procedures required for volunteers that work with youth.

Quiz

Required. Complete the [Working with Youth Quiz](#).

The assessment section of this unit is your opportunity to reflect upon the content covered in the presentation and for you to test your understanding of it. The passing score is 8 out of 10 points on a 5-question quiz (each question is worth 2 points for a total possible score of 10 points). You can take the quiz as many times as needed to obtain the passing score. The quiz is automatically graded. Your highest score will be recorded.

After you've completed the quiz, you will automatically see your quiz results with your correct and/or incorrect answers.

What's Next?

Continue to complete all requirements for this week's lessons before the date and time of the scheduled Zoom meeting.

Contact your Extension Agent if you have any questions or need additional information.

◀ Previous

Next ▶

- Home
- Announcements
- Grades
- Syllabus
- Ally Course Accessibility Report
- Microsoft OneDrive
- Top Hat
- Credentials
- Badges
- Zoom
- Course Gallery
- Gradescope
- Assignments
- Modules
- Discussions
- Rubrics
- Quizzes
- Pages
- Files
- Outcomes
- Collaborations
- People
- Settings

ⓘ This is a preview of the published version of the quiz.

Started: Jan 9 at 2:20am

Quiz Instructions

Required. Complete the [Working with Youth Quiz](#).

The assessment section of this module is your opportunity to reflect upon the content covered in the presentation and for you to test your understanding of it. The passing score is 8 out of 10 points on a 5-question quiz (each question is worth 2 points for a total possible score of 10 points). You can take the quiz as many times as needed to obtain the passing score. The quiz is automatically graded. Your highest score will be recorded.

Questions

- Question 1
 - Question 2
 - Question 3
 - Question 4
 - Question 5
- Time Elapsed: 0 Minutes, 24 Seconds

Question 1 2 pts

What are the 4 Essential Elements of Positive Youth Development?

Question 2 2 pts

Match the following characteristics to the correct age group / stage in development.

This age group has a strong desire for affection and attention of adults.

This age group is very active with boundless energy. Easily motivated and eager to try something new. Provide a wide variety of learning experiences for this age group.

This age group has lots of changes occurring within their bodies. - hormone changes, body image changes, and mood swings. Many youth of this age category are self-conscious.

This age group seeks freedom and independence. Peers are of extreme importance to this age group.

Question 3 2 pts

The best way to minimize negative youth behavior is by ignoring it.

True

False

Question 4 2 pts

The above suspicion policy states that volunteers should always have a group of _____ people.

Question 5 2 pts

Master food volunteers working with youth are not considered Mandated Reporters.

True

False

Appendix C: Working with Youth Master Food Volunteer Notebook Chapter

(below)

Virginia Cooperative Extension



notebook

Overview	1
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Working with Youth

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Overview

On completion of this chapter, the Master Food Volunteer will:

- Be familiar with Virginia Cooperative Extension's 4-H Youth Development program.
- Identify the four essential elements of positive youth development.
- Learn how to utilize the Targeting Life Skills and Experiential Learning models to plan effective youth programs.
- Distinguish the differences seen between youth ages and stages.
- Learn tips for working with youth in nutrition, food preparation, food safety, physical activity, health, and wellness programs.
- Be familiar with Virginia Cooperative Extension policies and procedures required for volunteers that work with youth.
- Identify partnership opportunities between the Master Food Volunteer program and the 4-H Youth Development program.

Introduction

This chapter will provide the foundational knowledge needed for Master Food Volunteers to confidently and effectively work with youth audiences. All youth programs offered through Virginia Cooperative Extension fall under the 4-H umbrella of extension programming.

When conducting or considering to conduct youth programs as a Master Food Volunteer, it is important to be familiar with Virginia Cooperative Extension's 4-H youth development program, positive youth development programming, and the policies and procedures required of volunteers working with youth in extension. It is also essential to be familiar with the different ages and stages of youth development, so you are readily able to adapt your programming to best meet the learning needs of the youth you are working with.

Prior to conducting youth programming, please contact your supervising agent and 4-H agent for support and approval to ensure that the youth program you are preparing meets all of the guidelines and policies required by 4-H.



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Virginia Tech, 2023

Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments. Its programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, military status, or any other basis protected by law.

4-H Youth Development

4-H is America’s largest out-of-school youth development organization, consisting of approximately six million youth across the country (National 4-H Council, n.d.). Virginia Cooperative Extension manages the 4-H youth development program in Virginia, with the help and guidance of county/city extension staff members and trained volunteers. 4-H was first established in the United States in 1902 in Ohio; however, it has now spread to over 80 countries across the globe (Meadows et al., 2001).

4-H is an informal, learn-by-doing, hands-on educational program for youth ages 5 to 18. 4-H is a program open to ALL youth regardless of race, culture, gender, religious affiliation, social, or economic background. See *4-H Opportunity for All* in “Handouts” section of this document. (Virginia Cooperative Extension, 2022a)

An official 4-H member is any youth between the ages of 5-18 that is enrolled on 4-H Online and participates in at least **six hours** of planned, related programming.



National 4-H Logo

The four H’s in 4-H stand for:

- Head**
- Heart**
- Hands**
- Health**

4-H Mission

The mission of 4-H is “to assist youth, and adults working with those youth, to gain additional knowledge, life skills, and attitudes that will further their development as self-directing, contributing, and productive members of society.”

4-H Motto

“To Make the Best Better.”

(Virginia Cooperative Extension, n.d.)

I pledge my HEAD to clearer thinking,
My HEART to greater loyalty,
My HANDS to larger service,
and my HEALTH to better living,
for my club, my community, my country,
and my world.



4-H Pledge (Photo courtesy of Gaston County 4-H, N.C. Cooperative Extension)

For more information about the Virginia 4-H program or to keep up-to-date on upcoming 4-H programs, please visit the following website:

<https://ext.vt.edu/4h-youth.html>

*Information in this section has been reprinted and adapted from the National 4-H Council website (<https://4-h.org/>) and the Virginia Cooperative Extension: 4-H/Youth webpage (<https://ext.vt.edu/4h-youth>).

Essential Elements of Positive Youth Development & Basic Needs of Youth

The four Essential Elements of Youth Development are:

- BELONGING**
- MASTERY**
- INDEPENDENCE**
- GENEROSITY**

These four elements are the basic principles that make up the 4-H Youth Development Program and are considered the four basic developmental needs of youth. Although each of these elements are important on their own, it is the combination of all four elements together that lead to positive youth development programming. These elements

assist volunteers and professionals planning youth programs. When planning a youth program, be sure to review these essential elements to make sure your program or activity incorporates each of these important elements. By incorporating these elements into your programming efforts, you will ensure that the youth program offers hands-on activities, experiential learning, safe learning environments, opportunities for mastery of skills, and opportunities for youth to develop the confidence needed to positively contribute to the community they are a part of (Samuel & Rose, 2011).

Belonging

- Youth form a positive relationship with a caring adult (mentors, advisors, guides)
- Youth are presented with an inclusive environment (encouraging and supporting members with positive feedback)
- Youth are presented with a safe environment (emotional and physical)

(Ivey & Mehlberg, 2006)

Mastery

- An Opportunity for Mastery and Skill Building (build knowledge of content and life skills; demonstrate one's competence)
- An Engagement in Learning (understand subject area and can build relationships and draw connections with other subject areas)

(Ivey & Mehlberg, 2006)

Independence

- Opportunity to See Oneself as an Active Participant in the Future
- Opportunity for Self-Determination / Opportunity for choice (potential to become self-directing, have influence over life choices)

(Ivey & Mehlberg, 2006)

Generosity

- Opportunity to Value and Practice Service to Others (experience citizenship, practice service to others, make a difference through community involvement)

(Ivey & Mehlberg, 2006)

Life Skill Development in 4-H

4-H is known for its ability and long history of teaching valuable life skills in youth. Teaching life skills in 4-H is essential to meet the four basic needs of youth development. Life skills are abilities youth can learn and development to cope with daily situations, make important decisions, and enhance quality of life (Norman & Jordan, 2018). Youth that earn life skills early in life will have higher likelihood of success, productivity, and satisfying lives

(Boyd et al., 1992).



Targeting Life Skills Model – 1998
Iowa State University Extension
Patricia A. Hendricks

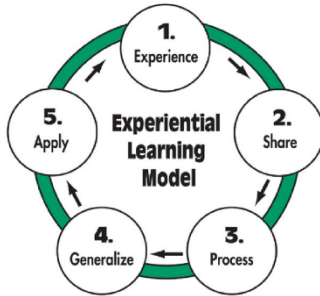
When planning youth development programs, professionals and volunteers should refer to the Targeting Life Skills Model to identify key life skills you are wishing to target in your program based on the ages of the youth you are working with. This model provides guidance and assistance for meeting basic needs of youth that are developmentally appropriate based on youth age and stage in life. By coordinating life skill development goals to the ages of your anticipated youth, your program will be more effective in achieving its goals.

*Information adapted from *Targeting Life Skills Model* (Hendricks, 1998), *University of Florida's Targeting Life Skills in 4-H* publication (Norman & Jordan, 2018), and the *Journal of Extension's Developing Life Skills in Youth* publication (Boyd et al., 1992).

Experiential Learning Model

The Experiential Learning Model is the program design model used to plan 4-H educational programs. The focus of this model is “learning by doing” which means programming must consist of primarily hands-on learning experiences. When professionals or volunteers are planning programs, it is

necessary to make sure the program offers each of the 5 steps of the experiential learning model: **Experience** (Do), **Share**, (Reflect), and **Apply** (al., 2016).



Process
Generalize,
(Weese et

Pfeiffer, J.W., & Jones, J.E. (1983). *Reference Guide to Handbooks and Annuals*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

See Experiential Learning Model in the “Handouts” section of this chapter.

Understanding Children: Ages & Stages of Development

There are certain milestones and needs that impact all youth. However, every child is unique and rates of development can vary between youth. It is important for professionals and volunteers to keep age characteristics in mind when planning and working with youth so you are able to modify programs to promote successful youth development based on the target group’s age. Remember, youth have different rates of development, so not all youth of the same age will be capable to complete the same tasks.

Four Developmental Stages

- **Early Childhood:** Ages 5 to 8 (Grades K to 3)
- **Middle Childhood:** Ages 9 to 11 (Grades 4 to 6)
- **Early Adolescence:** Ages 12 to 14 (Grades 7 to 9)
- **Adolescence:** Ages 15 to 18 (Grades 10 to 12)

(Hoffman & Krinke, 2023; Meadows et al., 2001)

Early Childhood (Ages 5 – 8): (Cloverbuds)

This age group’s thinking is concrete, focusing on what is here and now. They have a short attention span and do best with lessons involving their senses of sight, touch, and/or taste. They are curious to try new things and desire attention and affection from adults. This age group learns best if involved in a variety of hands-on, short, physically active, learning activities. It is especially important to provide hands-on learning opportunities for this age group. This age group’s needs are best met if you have the following ratio: 1 adult to 3-4 children. Avoid competition programs and activities with this age group. They are especially sensitive to criticism and do not accept failure well. This age group is learning to make friends. (Hoffman & Krinke, 2023; Meadows et al., 2001)

Middle Childhood: (Ages 9 – 11): (4-H Juniors)

This age group’s thinking is still relatively concrete, with some individuals starting to think logically and symbolically. If you incorporate abstract ideas with this age group, connect it back to something concrete that they can do, touch, or feel. This age group is an easily motivated group that enjoys jumping from one topic to another. They have lots of energy. They will need assistance staying on track to complete tasks. This age group is constantly seeking approval from their leaders and parents, wanting to know how they have improved over time. This age group has a difficult time comparing themselves to others, so focus on comparing the individual’s growth based on own performances. Group activities and activities with same sex is preferred. This age group looks up to older youth and has a desire to “belong” to clubs. (Hoffman & Krinke, 2023; Meadows et al., 2001)

Early Adolescence (Ages 12 – 14): (4-H Intermediates)

This age group has a wide range of differences in physical development. Girls typically enter puberty and mature earlier than boys. This group is very self-conscious about their body and changes that are occurring. This is an excellent age to provide health related learning experiences related to understanding their selves and the changes that are occurring. Provide education on good grooming habits at this age. Abstract thinking is seen predominately in this age group. It is good to allow this age group to work in small groups so

they are able to discuss ideas and concerns effectively. This age group no longer dependent on adults, but is now focused on following the opinions of peers. Lots of changes in hormones is seen at this age causing mood swings and emotional tendencies. It is still important to limit comparison between youth of this age group. This age groups desires increased independence and does well planning their own activities. This age group will not always do well in carrying out the plan, but they do enjoy the planning process. This age group likes activities involving both boys and girls. (Hoffman & Krinke, 2023; Meadows et al., 2001)

Adolescence (Ages 15 – 18): **(4-H Teens)**

This age group is very abstract in their thinking and are able to start interacting on adult levels. This is an excellent age group to focus on career education and setting goals. This age group is becoming more independent. Adults still should be involved in assisting in guiding this age group when making serious decisions. This age group is still battling with emotions, but they are able to increase responsibility capabilities. Many youth in this age group can interact like adults. It is important to become an advisor and let the teens plan and assume responsibility for their actions. This age group is extremely busy and many times will not have time to participate in programs due to busy schedules. (Hoffman & Krinke, 2023; Meadows et al., 2001)

See additional resources focused on understanding children’s stages of development in the “Handouts” section of this chapter.

*Information in Understanding Children: Ages & Stages of Development section has been reprinted and adapted from North Dakota State University Extension’s *Understanding and Working with Youth* (Hoffman & Krinke, 2023) and Virginia Cooperative Extension’s *Virginia 4-H Basic Volunteer Orientation Guide* (Meadows et al., 2001) publications.

Tips for Working with Youth in Food Safety & Health Related Programming

When creating a youth program, be sure to follow all of the guidelines mentioned in this chapter to build a youth program that incorporates the essential elements of youth development, accommodates youth learning capabilities (based on ages and stages), incorporates life skills from the life skills model, and

follows the experiential learning model. Focus on building a relationship and connection with the youth. Establish a **youth-adult partnership**, in which you emphasize youth contributions and create an environment of trust, respect, inclusivity, and cooperation (Olsen et al., 2022). When you connect with youth on a personal level and give them an opportunity where they feel they have a voice, youth are more willing to learn and be involved in what you are teaching them (Olsen et al., 2022).

All food safety and food related programs need to be HANDS-ON and ENGAGING. If you are working with an intermediate or senior level 4-H group, allow these students the opportunity to work directly with foods and cook. Research suggests that youth are most interested in food safety programs that involve hands-on cooking opportunities (Diehl et al., 2010).

Spend LESS time sitting, lecturing, and making kids listen. Focus MORE time on doing an activity – utilize the experiential learning model (Pfeiffer & Jones, 1983). Keep youth active and busy during programs. Idle hands will lead to mischief, injury, or other problems when working with foods.

If an accident or altercation between students occur, remember to REMAIN CALM. When students see you scared, worried, angry or concerned, they will react similarly. Remain calm to keep your group of students calm.

If you have teens in your program, utilize these teens as leaders and mentors for programs with younger youth. Many teens can plan and interact on an adult level, thus meaning many teens enjoy independence and leadership experience (Meadows et al, 2001). Not only does it help them earn community service hours, but it also helps you better connect and work with younger populations.

With cooking programs using electric skillets, be aware of electricity capabilities of the building and room you will be conducting your program in. Electric skillets will sometimes cause power surges if numerous skillets are running at the same time. You may need to alter your recipe or groups students into smaller groups to not overload the power supply.

Last but not least... ALWAYS have a first aid kit and extra disposable gloves with you to reduce exposure to bloodborne pathogens (Meadows et al., 2001). If you are conducting food programs utilizing knives and/or kitchenware, it is guaranteed that someone in your class will need a band-aid at some point during the session. It is essential that you wear gloves to protect yourself and the

youth from any potential bloodborne pathogen risks (Meadows et al., 2001).

Virginia Cooperative Extension's Policies and Procedures for Working with Youth

All youth programs of Virginia Cooperative Extension are classified under the 4-H Youth Development umbrella. When conducting youth programs as a part of Virginia Cooperative Extension, a series of policies and procedures must always be followed to ensure program safety and effectiveness. These procedures are put in place to protect employees, volunteers, and program participants. Virginia Cooperative Extension is committed to a policy of non-discrimination in education and is thus open to all people wishing to participate in educational programs.

Steps to Become a 4-H Volunteer

1. Express Interest in Working with Youth to Your Extension Agent / Extension Employee
2. Complete a Volunteer Interview
3. Complete 4-H Online Volunteer Enrollment
4. Complete a Background Check
5. Complete a Reference Check
6. Online Youth Protection Training
7. Volunteer Training for Relevant 4-H Program Involvement

*Information in this section has been adapted from the Virginia Cooperative Extension webpage - general webpage and 4-H/Youth tab (<https://ext.vt.edu/>).

Standards of Behavior for Volunteers Working with Youth

Virginia Cooperative Extension and 4-H volunteers are held to a high standard when it comes to expectations and standards of behavior. Volunteers must be enrolled as a Virginia Cooperative Extension Volunteer (Master Food Volunteer & 4-H Volunteer if working with youth), must complete a background check, complete an interview, and pass a reference check. Because of this detailed volunteer screening process and a history of a positive reputation working with youth, families across the commonwealth trust 4-H volunteers to properly care for their child when participating in 4-H programs. 4-H has a total of 15 standards of behavior that must be agreed upon prior to volunteer acceptance (Virginia Cooperative Extension, 2021a). These requirements ensure that the

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volunteer is aware of their role and is willing to fully support and represent the 4-H program while on their very best behavior. If any of the standards of behavior are broken while serving as a volunteer for 4-H, the volunteer can be dismissed and removed from the program immediately.

Review the *Standards of Behavior for Virginia 4-H Volunteers* in detail, found in the "Handouts" section of this publication (Virginia Cooperative Extension, 2021a). The document must be signed prior to working with youth populations.

Working with Youth Risk Management

Risk Management is the process through which you plan in advance to deal with negative problems that may occur. It provides a protection for the program, participants, volunteers, employee, and sponsors. (Virginia Tech, 2023)

For more details and information in regards to risk management procedures for Master Food Volunteers, please review FST-80-B (Chapter Two) of the Master Food Volunteer Training Notebook. Additionally, you can learn more about risk management at Virginia Tech by visiting the following website: <https://risk.vt.edu/risk-management.html>.

Documentation

When conducting youth programs, certain paperwork is needed on hand to adequately follow Virginia Cooperative Extension Guidelines.

When Conducting a Virginia Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Program, the Following Documentation is ALWAYS Needed:

- Volunteer enrollment completed & on file with the extension office
- Standards of Behavior form signed
- Approval to conduct program by supervising agent or extension office
- Participant list / Group information
- Written agenda, lesson plan, or other documentation of activities planned
- Virginia Cooperative Extension Emergency Procedures Card with you [Found in "Handouts" section of FST-80-B (Chapter two) of this notebook]
- 4-H Online enrollment of youth prior to participating in program OR group enrollment form if working with large groups, such as

classrooms, daycares, etc. Group Enrollment form is found in the “Handouts” section of this document. Contact your local 4-H Agent for more information on 4-H online enrollment.

- Code of Conduct signed (included in online enrollment process) Code of Conduct form is found in “Handouts” section of this document. (Virginia Cooperative Extension, 2021b)

Documentation that is **SOMETIMES Needed:**

- Accident insurance if high risk activity (Virginia Tech, 2023)
- Forms specific to the program (permission forms for transporting youth, general waivers, etc.)

Contact your supervising agent or local 4-H Agent to see if these documents would be relevant for you.

It is important to remember that if you are ever taking a group of youth on a field trip or are transporting youth in a vehicle, you **MUST** carry each youth’s 4-H Health History / Medical forms from 4-H Online enrollment with you in case of an accident or emergency.

*Information in this section has been adapted from the *Virginia 4-H Camping Handbook* (Virginia Cooperative Extension, 2022b) and the *Virginia 4-H Basic Volunteer Orientation Guide* (Meadows et al., 2001).

Above Suspicion Policy

This policy is put into place to provide a safe environment for all involved in Virginia Cooperative Extension programming. The primary purpose of this policy is to provide safety for all involved in 4-H programming. The the purpose is also to protect employees and staff from situations that could potentially occur in 4-H youth programs, where there is potential for being accused of abuse. (Meadows et al., 2001)

AVOID ALL ONE-ON-ONE INTERACTIONS!

You should always have at-least three people in a group when conducting extension programming. In ideal situations, adults would always have at least two adults present at all times when working with a group of children. (Meadows et al., 2001)

Other Policies

- 4-H Youth programs are for youth ages 5-18. 4-H does not work with youth below the age of 5.

- All Extension youth programs should be conducted with research-based, approved, age-appropriate curriculum.
- Prior to taking photographs of youth, it is essential to obtain Media Releases (Included in Online Enrollment Process) of all youth in photographs. Do not take photos of youth without permission from a parent or guardian. Form found in “Handouts” section of this document. (Virginia Cooperative Extension, 2020)
- Set a good example for youth at all times, in language and actions. (Virginia Cooperative Extension, 2021a)
- Extension programs do NOT allow for physical or emotional disciplinary measures. (Virginia Cooperative Extension, 2021b)

*Information in this section has been reprinted and adapted from Virginia Cooperative Extension’s 4-H/Youth webpage (<https://ext.vt.edu/4h-youth.html>).

Mandated Reporting

As a Virginia Cooperative Extension volunteer that may work with children, you have an obligation to serve as a mandated reporter. As a mandated reporter, you are required by law to report any suspicions of abuse or neglect of a child (Virginia Law Library, 2023). If you are conducting a program and a child tells you or shows signs of abuse or neglect, you will need to call the following to report the situation immediately: 1-804-786-8536, or call Social Services in the county/city where the child lives or where the abuse/neglect occurred (Virginia Department of Social Services, 2023).

Never confront or accuse anyone.

Keep everything CONFIDENTIAL.

Do not make promises to a child that has informed you about abuse. You are required by law to report all child abuse cases.

*Information in this section has been reprinted and adapted from Virginia Department of Social Services Child Protective Services’ webpage (<https://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/cps/index.cgi>) and the Virginia Law Library online database.

Additional Information

All risk management questions should be discussed with your supervising agent. If further questions arise or if you need clarification of information presented in this chapter, you should first reach out to your supervising agent or the 4-H Agent in your locality. If you need to contact Virginia Tech’s office of Insurance and Risk Management, their number is 540-231-7439.

Partnership Opportunities

Master Food Volunteers interested in working with youth have a wide array of programming options when partnering with 4-H youth development.

The following 4-H delivery modes are great partnership opportunities for nutrition, food safety, and health related programming efforts:

- 4-H Community or Project Based Clubs
- In-School 4-H (Yoga for Kids, Nutrition Education)
- After-School Enrichment (Nutrition, Cooking Programs, Yoga for Kids)
- School Enrichment (Nutrition Education)
- Special Interest Programs – Teen Cuisine, Food Challenge (Food Safety, Cooking Programs)
- 4-H Day Camps

Check Yourself Questions

1. What are the 4 Essential Elements of Positive Youth Development?
2. Can Master Food Volunteers teach youth?
3. What is the 4-H mission?
4. What is the “Above Suspicion” policy?
5. List 3 strategies to minimize youth misbehavior.

Check Yourself Answers

1. Belonging, Mastery, Independence, Generosity
2. Yes, they just need to follow Virginia Cooperative Extension’s 4-H Youth Development guidelines.
3. The mission of 4-H is “to assist youth, and adults working with those youth, to gain additional knowledge, life skills, and attitudes that will further their development as self-directing, contributing, and productive members of society.”
4. “The purpose of the Above Suspicion Policy is: (1) To provide a safe and caring environment for youth and adults in all 4-H program situations, and (2) To protect both salaried and volunteer staff from situations that potentially could occur in any 4-H youth program, including camps, trips, and other

events, where there is potential for being accused of abuse. Avoid any one-on-one situations.”

5. Provide Structure / Be Prepared; Model Behavior You Want to See; Give Choices

Resources for Further Reading

- Clemson Cooperative Extension: Home & Garden Information Center (Teaching Children about Food Safety) - <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/teaching-children-about-food-safety/#:~:text=It%20can%20make%20a%20lasting,ba,cteria%20to%20make%20us%20sick.>
- National Sanitation Foundation – (Scrub Club / Resources) - <https://www.scrubclub.org/>
- New Mexico State University: College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences. (Food Safety Resources) - <https://mediaproductions.nmsu.edu/products/foodsafety.html>
- Partnership for Food Safety Education - <https://www.fightbac.org/>

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Virginia Cooperative Extension — https://ext.vt.edu/content/dam/ext_vt_edu/topics/4h-youth/horse/programs/files/4h_basic_volunteer_orientation_guide.pdf

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