



## FLORIDA 4-H VOLUNTEER TRAINING SERIES<sup>1</sup>

### Learn by Doing + a Little Bit More

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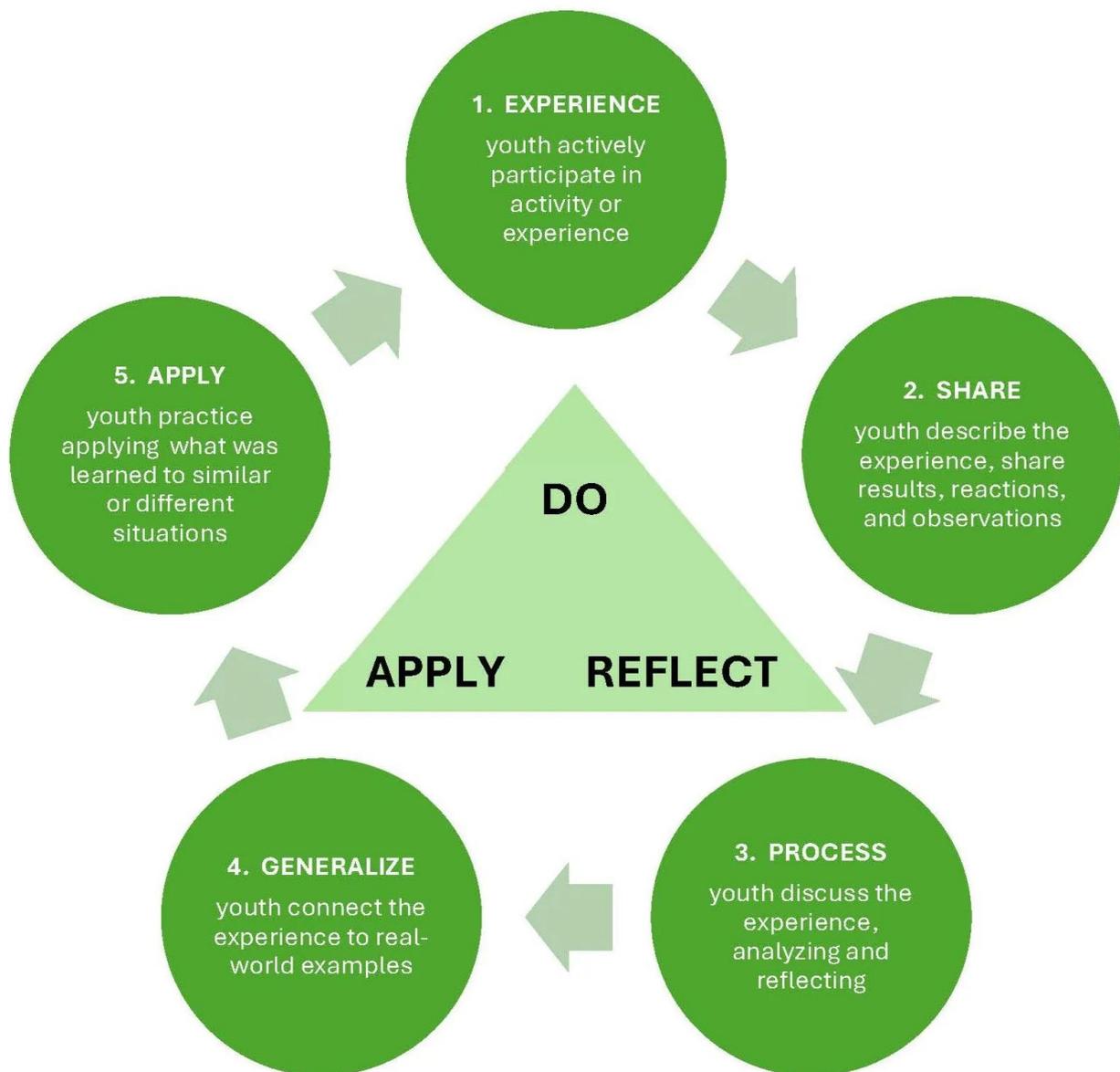


Figure 1. Experiential learning cycle.

Credit: Adapted from Pfeiffer & Jones (1985) by Candi Dierenfield, UF/IFAS

This is one publication in the Florida 4-H Volunteer Training Series. This series prepares 4-H volunteers to apply positive youth development best practices. “Learn by doing” is a common phrase used by staff and volunteers to explain how 4-H youth development teaches life skills. Experiential learning has been proven to be an effective

way to engage youth in the learning process. This publication provides volunteers with tools to help them apply the experiential learning model and outlines the steps volunteers can take to ensure that youth are able to apply what they have learned to new situations.

4-H relies on a five-step experiential learning model to teach life and content skills. The sequential steps of the model help youth reflect upon the experience or activity and apply learning to other experiences or situations. Cognitive and social learning theory supports the experiential learning model. It is also consistent with variations to the model, such as inquiry learning, and the learning cycle commonly used in science education today. **With this model, participants both experience and process the activity.** John Dewey (1938) explained that “Experiential Education takes place when a person involved in an activity looks back and evaluates it, determines what was useful or important to remember, and uses this information to perform another activity.”

The experiential learning model by Kolb (1984) and modified by 4-H includes five specific steps:

1. Youth **experience** by doing or performing a concrete activity.
2. Youth **share** their results of the activity with the group.
3. Ask questions to help youth **process** the experience to determine what was most important and identify common themes.
4. Youth **generalize** from the experience and relate it to their daily lives.
5. Ask questions to help youth **connect** what they learned to other experiences. This helps them **apply** what they learned to a new situation.

## How Can I Lead Experiential Learning?

The primary purpose of experiential learning is to allow youth the opportunity to integrate their learning, help them construct new meaning, and provide a sense of closure or completeness to their experience.

### Experience

Set up the learn-by-doing experience. Choose a hands-on activity that immediately focuses the attention on the learner rather than the leader. The leader should provide guidance throughout the experience but should not be directive. The goal is for youth to “experience” the activity to develop the life skill.

The most important aspect of this learning model is what a leader does. Remember to do the following:

- Show enthusiasm!
- Use encouragement.
- Make eye contact and smile.

- Let the youth figure out how to do it or let them explore before you share your knowledge.
- Use the entire learning space, not just the front of the room.
- Watch and listen to the youth.
- Ask yourself:
  - What are they stuck on?
  - What information do they not understand?
  - What kind of questions can I ask that will help them understand or discover something new?

4-H has designed many activities using the experiential learning model. Check any 4-H Project book for ideas. One example is folding and testing paper airplanes to determine how the design affects flight.

### Share

Sharing is accomplished by asking learners to reflect upon what they did. Present guiding questions that help them think about:

- what they did.
- what senses were engaged: what they saw, felt, heard, smelled, tasted, and so forth.
- what part of the experience was the most difficult and what part was the easiest for them.

Example Share Questions:

- What did you do?
- What did your group do when ...?
- What did you see, feel, hear, and/or taste?
- What did you do? Where did you go? What was your goal for this activity when you began?
- What was your most/least favorite thing about working on this activity?
- What did you learn while doing this activity? How did you feel?
- What was easiest? What surprised you?
- What did you learn about yourself?

### Process

In this step, youth are asked to think about how the experience was conducted or how the activity was performed. The leader can assist in this process by:

- setting aside enough time to reflect on the experience(s).
- asking open-ended questions that direct the learning.
- listening carefully.
- using wait time helps get responses from participants; pause for at least 5 seconds after asking a question.

The questions you ask are important. Leaders can prepare the questions ahead of time but need to be flexible enough to allow youth to take the conversation into a new direction. Questions should lead youth to think about:

- what procedures or steps they used in doing the activity.
- what problems or issues came up as they did the activity.
- how they dealt with these problems.
- how they thought the activity or experience was going to work.
- why the life skill they practiced is important.

Example Process Questions:

- What did you learn about yourself by doing this project/activity? How did others help you?
- How did you make your decisions? What steps did you take?
- What did you learn about making decisions?
- What made this a good project/activity?
- What were some of the common themes or thoughts you had?
- What problems came up over and over again? How did you handle them?
- What would you do if ...? (Refer to a challenge they could have faced related to the activity.)
- What was the most challenging part of your project/activity? Why? How did you solve it? What did you learn from this project/activity that you did not know before?
- What suggestions would you have for someone else who wanted to do a similar project or activity?
- Why does it matter (to you or anyone else) that you did this project/activity?
- What life skill(s) were you developing through your project? Why is the life skill important?
- What did you learn through sharing with others?
- What new questions do you have about yourself and others?

## Generalize

In this step, the discussion becomes more personal, focusing on what the experience means to the participant and what they learned. The subject matter alone can remain the focus of the discussion in all five steps of the model, or part of the discussion can shift to other life skills youth practice while working with the subject matter. Questions should lead youth to determine:

- what they learned from the experience.
- how this learning relates to or compares with other things they have been learning.
- what similar experiences they have had with this life skill or subject matter.

Example Generalize Questions:

- What key points have you learned?
- Have you had similar experiences related to this project/activity?
- Where have you faced similar challenges in your life?
- How is this life skill important to you?
- Where might this situation occur in the future?
- Do you remember another time when you had fun and learned new things at the same time?
- Why is it important to have plenty of information before making decisions?
- What did you learn about your decision-making skills?
- What did you learn about your skill in communicating with others?
- How would you describe your skills regarding ...? (Refer to a specific part of the activity.)
- What advice would you give to someone who wants to learn about this life skill?

## Apply

This last step in the model directs youth to apply what they learned to their lives.

Questions are structured to address:

- how what they learned relates to them personally.
- how they can use what they learned.
- how they can apply what they learned to future situations.

Example Apply Questions:

- How do you think the project/activity relates to your everyday life?
- Why was this project/activity important to you?
- What have you learned about yourself and others?
- Are there principles or guidelines you can use in real-life situations?
- What similar situations have you experienced?
- How can you use these skills in different situations?
- In what ways do people help each other learn new things?
- How will you act differently as a result of this experience?
- What are some ways you can learn new things?
- What qualities do you think are important in a leader?
- If someone helped or mentored you in this project, what would you tell him/her you learned? What difference has it made in your life? How would you express your appreciation?

Remember to allow 4H'ers to direct the learning and decide what is next, thus restarting the learning cycle. You may also engage youth in another activity that applies what they have learned in this stage. This allows you to assess if they have learned the concept or skill.

## Tips on Asking Questions

Have a list of open-ended questions ready.

Questions should start with easier, concrete questions and progress to analysis or synthesis questions. The 4-H Experiential Learning Cards are a helpful tool; find them at the [UF/IFAS Extension Bookstore](#).

As you watch the youth perform the activity, jot down interesting observations. These can help you create good questions on the spot.

Youth who are reluctant to answer questions in a group will often open up to one or two peers. You may want to ask the group to form pairs or triads to discuss something and report the highlights of that discussion with the larger group.

Some youth respond well to fill-in-the-blank statements rather than questions, such as "I learned that ..." and "I was frustrated with ...."

Try not to put youth on the spot. If they do not want to answer, move on.

Adjust your questions based on the responses youth give. Continue to help them build on their experiences.

Do not forget to use the wait time; pause for at least 5 seconds before you rephrase your question. Try not to answer for youth. Remember, you want to find out what they know.

If you can back out of the conversation when youth start talking and asking each other questions about the activity, you know good learning is occurring!

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