



Online Learning Fact Sheet for the 4-H Youth Development Program

Promoting Positive Youth Development

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Online learning environments may provide opportunities for youth to experience positive youth development that are similar to the opportunities provided in physical learning environments. Youth development programs are well positioned to foster innovation for online learning that promotes youth development.

Positive youth development occurs from an intentional process that promotes positive outcomes by building on young people's strengths and assets through positive youth-adult relationships, life skills development, safety, and youth leadership (Lerner et al. 2011).

Practices

Positive youth development may be promoted in online learning environments with adaptations to ensure core practices are integrated:

- *Safety and belonging:* Adult maintains a focus on safety and belonging in all functions so youth experience physical and emotional well-being and have opportunities to belong.
- *Youth-adult relationships:* Adult fosters strong relationships with youth. Youth need to have positive, sustained, and trusting relationships with caring, competent, and committed adults. Interactions between youth and adults must be respectful, encouraging, promote a sense of trust and belonging, and be focused on the growth and development of each youth.
- *Life skills development:* Developing life skills is emphasized through culturally relevant educational activities targeting knowledge, applied skills, interpersonal attributes (self-esteem, confidence, empathy, character), and social skills (teamwork, public speaking).
- *Youth leadership:* Opportunities for leadership are provided in valued home, school, and community activities. Youth are engaged in decision making and able to actively participate and contribute.



Photo: Kayla Louis



Outcomes

When implemented well, positive youth development will occur in online environments and achieve similar outcomes to positive youth development in physical environments. There are 6 C's of positive youth development (Lerner 2004):

- **Competence:** The ability to be successful in social situations (conflict management) and make good decisions in school and at work.
- **Confidence:** An internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy.
- **Connection:** Positive bonds with people, institutions, peers, family, school, and community.
- **Character:** Respect for societal and cultural norms, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong (morality), and integrity.
- **Caring:** A sense of sympathy and empathy for others.
- **Contribution:** The capacity to participate effectively by caring for themselves, and by giving of themselves at home, in the community, and in civic life.



Positive Technological Development

The positive technological development framework may be useful for educators planning an educational project so that it promotes all the 6 C's. The framework provides guidance on the types of digital activities, online experiences, and programs that promote the 6 C's and positive technological development (Bers 2012). It acts as a checklist for educators in selecting and adapting activities and experiences, so youth have opportunities to create content, be creative, communicate, choose their conduct, collaborate, and build community. Strengthening these opportunities will help promote positive youth development.



Positive technological development framework

Content Creation (Competence)

Youth create personally meaningful projects; youth are producers and not consumers; youth develop competency in online culture.

Creativity (Confidence)

Youth participate in activities that allow them to have creative expression; youth share and reflect on their experiences together.

Communication (Connection)

Synchronous and asynchronous communication through text, voice, sound, and video; adults provide informal and structured time for conversation between youth and adults.

Choices of Conduct (Character)

Adults provide boundaries and youth have freedom to make choices, take risks, experience consequences, and reflect on their behavior.

Collaboration (Caring)

Youth share common tasks that require they depend on and respond to each other; youth use technology to help others.

Community Building (Contribution)

There is a shared sense of community responsibility; democratic participation.

References

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