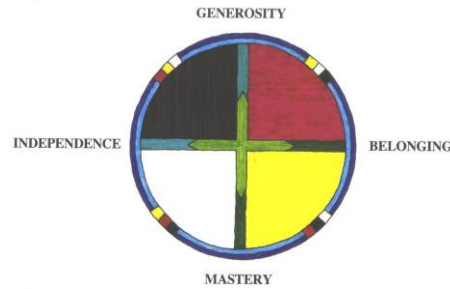


The Circle of Courage and Meeting the Needs of Youth Abridged Version



In 4-H Youth Development we use the model of the Circle of Courage to show how we work to meet the needs of youth. The Circle of Courage comes from a Native American model of youth development. The circle in the center symbolizes a medicine wheel in Native American culture. The circle also symbolizes that we all are connected, interconnected and dependent on one another. If the circle stays intact, we have the courage we need to care for others and make good decisions for ourselves. But if something happens that causes the circle to break, we become discouraged which affects how we treat others and how we make decisions.

The four quadrants inside the circle also have symbolism in Native American culture. The quadrants can represent the four directions—north, south, east and west; the four colors of people; or the four forces of nature—earth, wind, fire, and water. When we are talking about positive youth development, the quadrant represents the four needs we all have (after our basic needs of food, water, and shelter are met). These needs are belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity (and yes, they are sequential).

The first need we all have is the need for belonging. What does it mean to belong?

Belonging means we feel connected, important, valued, part of the group. It feels good to know that others want to have us around.

What actions show others that we are interested in them? (Smiling, saying hello, asking people how they are doing, engaging in conversation, asking someone to sit with you, asking someone to join you for an activity or outing.) Including people can range from the simple to the more complicated, but we all need to work on performing at least the simple ideas with others.

Belonging is the heart of 4-H. I pledge my heart to greater loyalty as I care for others and nurture relationships with others. This helps me meet my need for belonging while I meet other's need for belonging.

The next need is the need for mastery. What does it mean to have mastery over something?

Mastery means being good at something, having skills, knowing we are capable and can be successful at something. Mastery involves all the skills we learn through 4-H and other activities.

Are we all good at the same things? Of course not, and we don't need to be. (Optional—go around group asking each person to share one thing they are good at doing.) In 4-H, we need to help each young person and volunteer realize the skills they already have and the skills they can gain through practice and experience. This is how we meet needs for mastery.

If a young person's need for belonging has been met, s/he will feel pretty good about trying new things to learn new skills. But what if a youth's need for belonging hasn't been met or has been met in a negative way? Often s/he becomes very nervous or anxious about trying something new. One might fear failure or being made fun of in a given situation. This is why it is important to know that the meeting a person's need for belonging comes first and deserves our attention at all times. We must take the time to develop relationships with those whom we serve.

Mastery is the health of 4-H. I pledge my health to better living. I gain mastery of skills for better living that will help me throughout my life.

The third need is the need for independence. What does it mean to be independent?

Independence means that one is starting to do more things on his/her own without adult guidance. It also means making more decisions for oneself. An important thing for youth to learn at this point is that they aren't victims with things happening to them all the time. Youth must understand that the decisions that they make have consequences for themselves and for those around them. So the consequences that occur have much to do with the decision that was made.

If a child's need for belonging and mastery have been met in a positive way, they will most often make good decisions for themselves. However, if the needs for belonging and mastery haven't been met or have been met in negative ways, they have more difficulty making good choices. Poor choices lead to negative consequences which can set the stage for more poor choices. Again, starting with meeting the need for belonging is important as we move to meeting the need for independence.

Independence is the head of 4-H. I pledge my head to clearer thinking in the decisions I make.

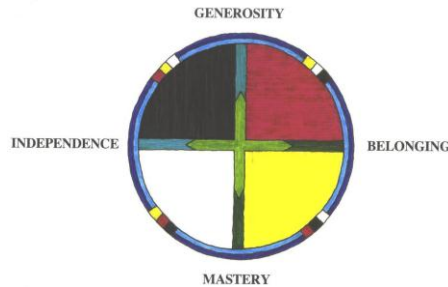
The final need is the need for generosity. What does it mean to be generous?

Generosity means that one gives back to the community through service or gives back to others by lending a helping hand.

Generosity is the hands of 4-H. I pledge my hands to larger service as I serve others, my club, my community, and my world.

This is positive youth development. This is 4-H!

The Circle of Courage and Meeting the Needs of Youth Long Version



We all know that fostering a positive self concept is a primary goal in the development of children. Yet, as we have all struggled to understand and develop self concept in young people, the youth development researchers, Brentro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern, in *Reclaiming Youth At Risk*, 1990, indicated that possibly the best place to look is in the traditional Native American culture.

Traditional Native American educational and parenting practices once thought to be “uncivilized” addresses each of the four basic components of self concept:

(1) significance was nurtured in a culture that celebrated the universal need for belonging, (2) competence was insured by guaranteed opportunities for mastery, (3) power was fostered by encouraging the expression of independence, and (4) virtue was reflected in the value of generosity.

Lakota Sioux artist George Bluebird has designed a graphic symbol, the Circle of Courage, to represent this philosophy of child development using a traditional Native American medicine wheel. (Brentro, et.al, 1990, p. 35)

The fact that there are four components to this model is significant. Native people feel the number four has sacred meaning. They see it as a person standing in a circle surrounded by the four directions. The colors in the medicine wheel may represent the four directions, the four colors of people or the four elements of nature -- earth, wind, fire and water. The circle itself is a symbol of life with every part connected to every other. What happens to one part affects everything else. When the circle of courage is broken, the lives of children are no longer in harmony and balance. In other words, without belonging, mastery, independence and generosity there can be no courage but only discouragement. (Brentro, et. al., 1990)

These four basic needs define a relationship between the individual and others in the larger community. When there is courage and when the circle is not broken, youth get their needs met in a positive way and become the ones we all love to be around. When the circle is broken, discouragement is a predominant force and needs can either be met in a distorted way or not at all. When needs are met in a negative way youth become a challenge for us to work with. It is equally disturbing is when their needs go unmet. These young people can disassociate with everyone entirely, become dependent on us or exhibit behavior that is difficult to understand. Furthermore, young people get caught in a pattern of learned behavior. Even though they may be physically moved from one setting and put into a healthier one, they will not have the skills needed to get their

Provided by Vanette Grover, 4-H Youth Development Specialist, Iowa State University Extension, July 2007. Reference: *Reclaiming Youth at Risk*, Brentro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern, 1990.

needs met in a positive way unless that is the way they've operated before. So it is important that we teach young people how to get these needs met in a positive way.

We believe that what we offer through our 4-H and Youth programs help youth do just that. Youth learn and practice life skills that help them meet their own needs and realize the needs of others.

What do you think belonging refers to?

To meet the need of Belonging, youth must feel that others care about them, that they are important to the group, that they are valued, that they belong to and are a part of the group. We must do what we can to promote trusting relationships and help youth feel connected to another youth or to an adult in the group.

What simple things can we do to help youth feel they belong? (Smile, say hi, listen to them, sit with them, develop a caring relationship.)

Belonging is symbolized by the HEART of 4-H.

What do you think mastery means?

To meet the need of Mastery, youth must feel and believe they are capable and successful. Encourage youth to solve problems, be challenged, figure things out, develop self-competence and do what it takes to survive. Through the exploration of ideas and activities related to their interests, youth learn skills and participate in experiences that help them make positive life choices for their future. This is a major part of 4-H, developing those life skills and helping youth discover their passions.

When our need for belonging is met, we are more confident in trying new things to learn what we are good at.

Mastery is symbolized by the HEALTH of 4-H.

What do you think independence means?

The need for Independence is met in youth by knowing they are able to influence people and events. Youth need to feel a sense of autonomy and self-awareness. Youth learn how to make good decisions, assert positive leadership and exercise self discipline. In meeting this need, youth learn that the decisions they make not only affect themselves, but also affect those around them. They also learn that they are not victims, as they once may have thought. They have the power to make appropriate decisions.

When we know we belong and have mastered important life skills, chances are that we will make good decisions when meeting our need for independence. If our need for belonging hasn't been met and we aren't comfortable with what we might be good at, we probably won't make very good decisions when we are trying to meet our need for belonging. Think of youth you know. Think of all of the youth issues in the country. Many of these issues start with the basics--kids don't feel that they belong and they don't feel that they are good at anything-- then they make poor decisions.

Provided by Vanette Grover, 4-H Youth Development Specialist, Iowa State University Extension, July 2007. Reference: *Reclaiming Youth at Risk*, Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern, 1990.

Independence refers to the HEAD of 4-H.

What do you think generosity refers to?

To meet the need of Generosity, youth must practice helping others through their own generosity. Youth need to feel their life has meaning and a sense of purpose. Youth need to be involved in helping relationships, community service, and citizenship activities. They not only need to be involved in the implementation, they need to be active partners in the development and evaluation stages, as well.

Generosity refers to the HANDS of 4-H.

We all play a very important role in the positive development of youth. Perhaps the most important role we play is in fostering youth's sense of belonging. Please take time to look at your own club situations and think about how you can further impact youth's sense of belonging. It is critical that we do.

In order to get to our results, those critical life skills that impact youth, we must first follow through with our reason for being: meeting the needs of youth.

