



4-H ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Belonging

All young people want to belong and be members of groups. Groups may be formal like classrooms and school sports teams or informal like 4-H clubs.

*There are three essential elements that, when present in 4-H clubs, create a strong feeling of **BELONGING** among club members: a caring adult, a safe environment, an inclusive environment.*

Belonging is having a positive relationship with a caring adult.

What does this mean?

- This is the MOST important element to a positive youth development project. Having positive 4-H leaders to help our members is IMPORTANT.
- As a caring adult in your 4-H club you act as an advisor, guide, and mentor.
- You can help your club members set boundaries and expectation.
- You serve as the supporter, friend, and advocate for the 4-H member you are working with.

What does this look like in a 4-H experience?

- Adult volunteer leaders call youth members by their first names. If you have a large club consider name tags to help you in making this happen.
- Get to know the interests of your members. Ask questions that show them you care and be an active listener to what they have to say.
- Pay attention to the activities of members outside of the meetings. Recognize and talk about what they are doing outside of your 4-H club and event.

- Structure group activities so that both youth and adults have time to learn about one another.

Belonging is having a safe emotional and physical environment.

What does this mean?

- Create an environment of support and encouragement.
- Safety is a basic need, we want an environment that promotes emotional and physical safety.
- 4-H experiences need to be free from danger and equipped for the activities planned.
- Participants need to know that youth and adults will not make fun of each other, insult each other, or threaten each other. This behavior is not tolerated as part of the 4-H experience.

What does this look like in a 4-H experience?

- Don't tolerate bullying, cliques, or put-downs.
- Be sure that all of the adults working with youth in your club are screened and trained in safety and child protection.

- Talk to club members about electrical, fire, water, first aid, and even food safety.
- Help club members learn about safety aspects of their 4-H projects.
- Be sure that the YOUTH in your group (club, committee, project area, etc) are helping to plan, implement, and evaluate what you are doing.

Belonging is creating an inclusive environment.

What does this mean?

- Our program brings together youth and adults from different backgrounds, experiences, and levels of comfort. As leaders we need to work to make sure that everyone feels welcome to the program.
- Our 4-H program needs to be a place where individual members and leaders feel supported and encouraged.

What does this look like in a 4-H experience?

- Youth members encourage each other during fair judging, 4-H contest, sporting events, or even academic challenges.
- Members know that they are part of your club, your county, the Wyoming 4-H program, and the National 4-H program. This can be done through buttons, matching t-shirts, hats, or other symbols that show group membership.
- Members are encouraged to invite friends, and feel comfortable bringing friends to your group. Think about having special new member events throughout the year.
- Look for ways to recognize all your members, not just those who excel in competition.
- Start meetings and events with ice breakers and fun game that gets everyone involved.
- Surround your club meetings and 4-H events with the clover. Anyone entering your meeting or event should know it is a 4-H experience. Place clovers at entrances and throughout your meeting space.

As a 4-H leader are you helping or hindering belonging in the 4-H experience? Check where you are by referencing the Belonging checklist. The checklist will give you ideas on ways to make sure belonging is happening in the 4-H projects, meetings, and activities that you are helping to lead.