

4-H Life Skills

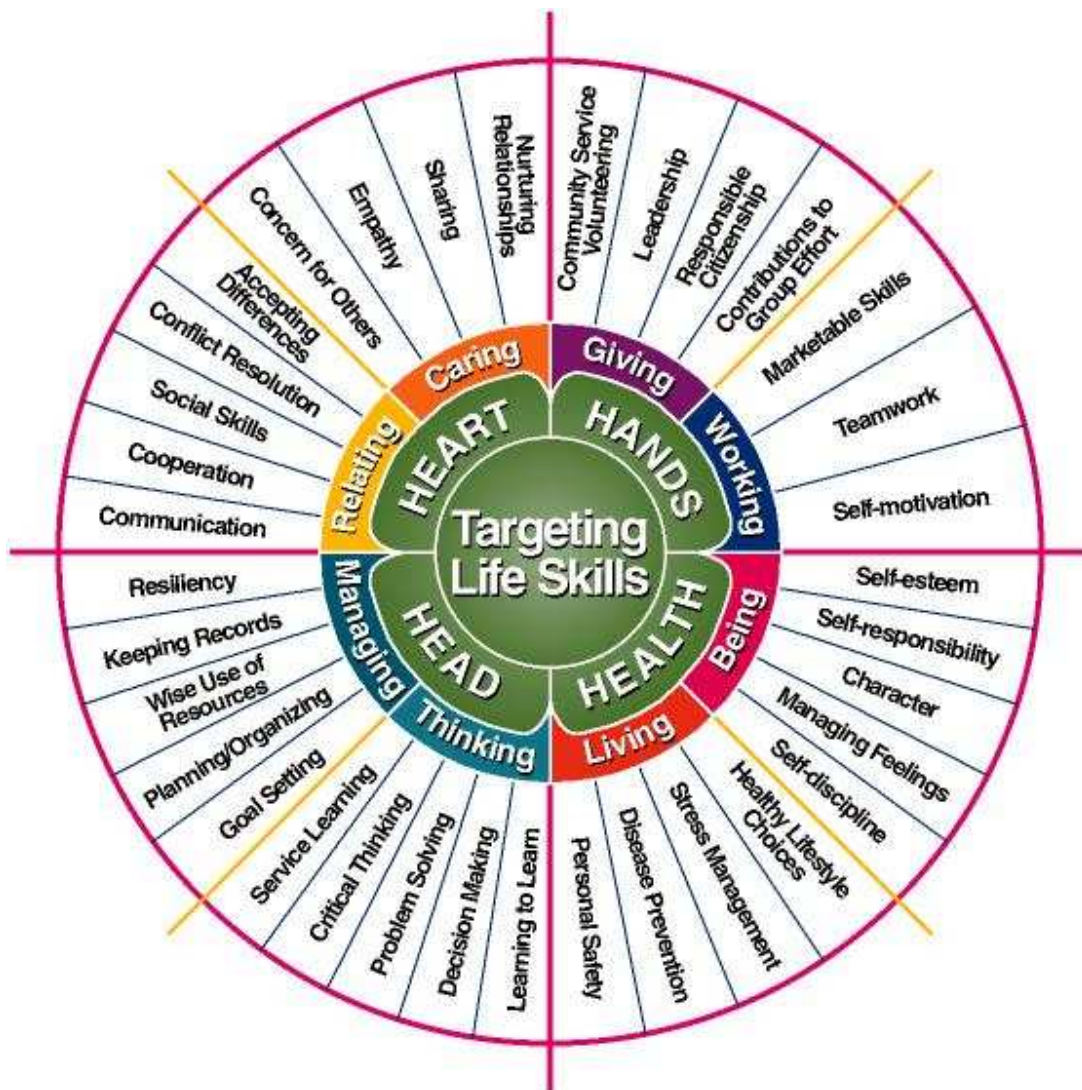
Incorporating developmentally-appropriate learning opportunities to assess impact of life skill development.

Youth development is a process of mental, physical, social and emotional growth during which young people prepare to live a productive and satisfying life within the customs and regulations of their society. People who develop programs and curricula for youth are in the business of providing educational opportunities through which youth can learn information and develop skills they need.

Youth development experiences of high quality don't just happen. The best ones are carefully planned (a) to encourage life skill development while delivering subject matter content and (b) to achieve specific results. It has become increasingly important to be accountable for resources expended by documenting program impact. By clearly stating desired changes as program objectives, youth development experiences can be evaluated more effectively to determine if the program succeeded in making the intended difference in the lives of youth.

A skill is a learned ability to do something well. Life skills are abilities individuals can learn that will help them to be successful in living a productive and satisfying life. In the Targeting Life Skills (TLS) Model categories of life skills are identified and divided on the basis of the familiar four H's from the 4-H Clover that represent Head, Heart, Hands, and Health. Two general categories of skills are included under each of the four headings.

The goal of youth programming is to provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for young people to experience life skills, to practice them until they are learned, and be able to use them as necessary throughout a lifetime. Through the experiential learning process, youth internalize the knowledge and gain the ability to apply the skills appropriately.



The TLS Model

The TLS Model is intended to be inclusive for all possible life skills. The terminology in the TLS Model is not the same as that used in any one other current list of life skills. By being generic, the model allows those developing curriculum to incorporate any specific life skill that youth programmers may wish to address using whichever terminology is descriptive of that skill.

The purpose of the TLS Model is to provide a way to simplify coordination of life skill development with ages and stages tasks so programs will be developmentally appropriate and more effective in achieving identified outcomes. For too long these strategies have been treated separately when describing aspects of youth development. Life skill development is mapped sequentially over four age groupings of youth to indicate a continuum of growth. This continuum will guide planners in identifying an appropriate developmental level for content delivery. By assigning developmentally appropriate tasks to specific life skills, the TLS Model has the potential to greatly improve the possibility of achieving measurable program success in youth development.

There is not complete agreement on the specific life skills needed by youth, or on a set of desired behaviors that ensure success in life. It is easier to identify the problem behaviors that occur when the youth do not reach the expected societal goals. By reviewing a number of models proposed by several authors, certain consistent categories of competencies emerged. These categories can be used as the basis of life skill development. Authors generally agree that life skills are learned through experience. Life skills often must be practiced over and over before mastery is achieved.

