



## Learn By Doing the 4-H Way

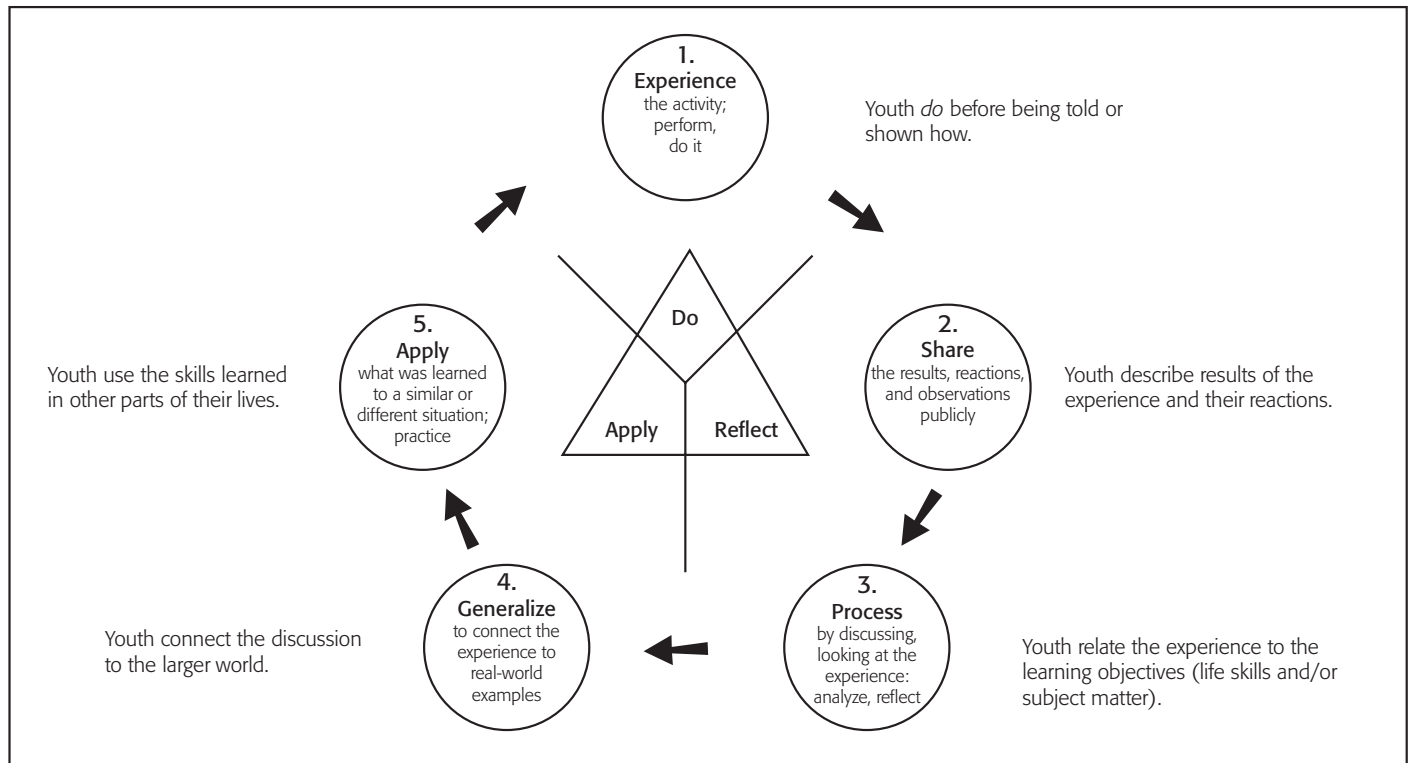
### Putting a Slogan into Practice

“Learn by doing” is a commonly used expression in 4-H. An understanding of this process called “experiential learning” will help leaders provide 4-H members with rewarding and fun experiences. As you begin to use this process, it may take more time to prepare than a lecture or a demonstration for a club meeting. Yet, you will soon find the time spent is well worth the effort.

### The Experiential Learning Process

The “learn-by-doing” approach allows youth to experience something with minimal guidance from an adult. Youth are challenged to explore a problem, situation, or activity and create their own solutions. Leaders ask questions, accept everyone’s ideas, and encourage curiosity.

#### 4-H Experiential Learning Process





## Steps to Follow - Putting the Experiential Learning Process into Action

First, it is important to review the lesson or subject matter and any accompanying materials and to practice the activities to be taught. As a club leader, the adult should help guide youth in a process through which they can propose hypotheses and determine their own “solutions.” The experiential learning model contains five steps but can be summarized into three main processes: Do, Reflect, and Apply. Not every step of the process is done for every activity, and sometimes steps within each of the three are combined. However, it is important to complete the three main processes of the learning cycle by the time the total lesson unit is completed.

Below are the roles of youth members and adult leaders in each of the steps of the experiential learning process:

### 1. Experience (Doing)

*Leader:* Describe the experience or activity you will have youth do before they are told or shown how. Encourage youth to think about what they might see or what might happen by asking questions, such as “What do you expect to see?” or “Write down your hypothesis or prediction of what might happen here.”

*Youth:* Experience the activity: perform, do it. Except for basic instructions on organization, safety, or time requirements, youth “do” before being told or shown how.

These two steps provide an opportunity for youth to develop logical thoughts, verbalize those thoughts, relate to others in the group, and compare experiences and opinions. It is important to promote an atmosphere of acceptance of individual participants and diverse thinking.

### 2. Share (What happened?)

*Leader:* Develop questions you will ask the students about their experience and their reaction to it after they have completed the activity.

*Youth:* Share the results, reactions, and observations with the group. Youth describe the results of the experience and their reactions.

### 3. Process (What’s important?)

*Leader:* Develop questions that you will ask the students about something they felt was important about the experience.

*Youth:* Process by discussing, looking at the experience: analyzing, reflecting. Youth relate the experience to the targeted subject matter and life skills being learned.

The final two steps provide activities or questions for youth to help summarize what they have experienced. It enables them to generalize what they have learned to other examples and situations.

### 4. Generalize (So what?)

*Leader:* Develop questions that will ask the students how the experience related to their own lives.

*Youth:* Generalize to connect the experience to real-world examples. Youth connect the subject matter and life skill discussion to the larger world.



## 5. Apply (Now what?)

*Leader:* Develop questions that ask the students how they could apply what they learned to a similar or different situation.

*Youth:* Apply what was learned to a similar or different situation; practice. Youth use the new subject matter and life skill experiences in other parts of their lives.

## Asking Questions

One of the most important roles of the adult group leader is to stimulate youth to think about “Why?” and “How?” and “What if?” Asking open-ended questions helps challenge youth to think. This also provides opportunities to evaluate their experience and progress along the way.

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### References:

Rutgers Cooperative Extension Curriculum Development Guide for 4-H/Youth Audiences. June 1998

The Learn-By-Doing Approach to Life Skill Development. Rutgers Cooperative Extension. February 1998

Curriculum Development for Issues Programming-A Handbook for Extension Youth Development Professionals. Youth Curriculum Development Task Force, 1992. Rev. 1996.



## *Did You Know...*



Reba McIntyre, Hershel Walker, Lester Brown, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Faith Hill, Jim Davis, Johnny Cash, Dolly Parton and Al Gore are all 4-H alumni.

*For more information on New Jersey 4-H, please visit [www.nj4h.rutgers.edu](http://www.nj4h.rutgers.edu).*

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