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5 Languages of Youth Appreciation



Primary Contributing Authors:

South Dakota 4-H Positive Youth Development Outcome Team

- » Becca Tullar, SDSU Extension 4-H Educator - Brown County
- » Nathan Skadsen, SDSU Extension 4-H Educator - Minnehaha County
- » Ann Price, SDSU Extension 4-H Educator - Hand County
- » Jodi Loehrer, SDSU Extension 4-H Educator - Codington County
- » Lauren Hollenbeck, former SDSU Extension 4-H Educator - Clay and Union Counties
- » Jenae Hansen-Gross, SDSU Extension 4-H Volunteer Development Field Specialist
- » Ron Frederick, SDSU Extension 4-H Educator - Rosebud

Adapted from:

- » “5 languages of Appreciation in the Workplace” by Gary Chapman and Paul White (2007), “5 Love Languages of Children” by Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell (1997), and “5 Love Languages for Teenagers” by Gary Chapman (2000).

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Words of Affirmation	3
Quality Time	5
Acts of Service	7
Tangible Gifts	9
Appropriate Physical Touch.	11
Conclusion	13



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



Introduction

The Importance of Caring Adults

One of the foundations of the South Dakota 4-H program is the relationships between 4-H youth and caring adults. By facilitating a space where youth feel safe both physically and emotionally, caring adults create opportunities for 4-H youth to experience belonging. A sense of belonging will lead to 4-H youth having more positive outcomes in their lives and 4-H experiences. Caring adults can increase this sense of belonging and strengthen their positive relationships with 4-H youth through showing appreciation in their interactions.

Appreciation vs. Recognition

In the South Dakota 4-H program, one of the ways we celebrate and show positive outcomes for our 4-H youth is through recognition. This is mainly done through the awarding of 4-H youth for specific achievements. Examples of this include handing out ribbons and awards at your achievement day shows or recognition events.

Although some 4-H youth do value and get joy out of receiving these awards, many others (especially older youth) may not want them. Many 4-H youth also do not like to be publicly recognized. Think of the reactions some youth have when they are asked to step forward during your county's recognition event.

Instead of focusing on recognition, this guide will ask you to consider appreciation. While recognition focuses mainly on performance, appreciation focuses on the value of youth. Recognition focuses on what a person does, appreciation focuses on who a person is. By showing appreciation for our 4-H youth, not only will their sense of belonging increase but their relationship with caring adults will also strengthen.

5 Languages of Appreciation

While recognition is usually a one-size-fits-all approach to recognizing youth (ie. first place always gets a purple ribbon), appreciation can be modified to fit what “fills the tank” of our 4-H youth best. Dr. Gary Chapman has identified five different “languages” of appreciation. They include:

- » Words of Affirmation
- » Quality Time
- » Acts of Service
- » Tangible Gifts
- » Appropriate Physical Touch

The five different languages of appreciation acknowledge that everyone receives appreciation differently and are fulfilled by different things. Identifying these differences and showing appreciation to youth in multiple ways will allow caring adults to better create a positive youth development environment.

Use of the Languages as a 4-H Caring Adult

It may seem overwhelming to know what each 4-H youth’s preferred language of appreciation is. In many cases you will not be able to determine the primary appreciation language for all of the 4-H youth you interact with. This guide is written with that in mind. By providing a brief overview of each language, what to consider before practicing the language, and some specific examples of how you might use each language in common 4-H settings, the hope is that you will increase the use of all five languages in your interactions with 4-H youth. Increasing the amount of time and ways that we show appreciation for the youth in our program will lead to stronger relationships and increase their overall sense of belonging.





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Words of Affirmation

Use words to convey a positive message to another person.

The word encouragement means to instill courage. Words of affection and endearment, words of praise and encouragement, words that give positive guidance all say, “I care about you.” Youth often feel the greatest sense of appreciation in expressions that affirm them. The tone of voice, the gentleness of a mood, the sense of caring all communicate emotional warmth and appreciation.

Things to Consider:

- » Praise youth in front of their peers and other adults
- » Avoid hollow praise.
 - Don't affirm someone just to affirm them
 - Sincerity is especially important in early adolescents and adolescents. They are looking for adults with integrity and authenticity. Be sure to praise specifics with this age group.
- » Praise is best received when you have a healthy relationship with the person you are praising.
 - If you don't know the 4-H youth very well, maybe ask their club leader to do the words of affirmation or another 4-H youth who is friends with them.
- » If you can't praise results, praise efforts.
 - Encouraging words are most effective when they are focused on a specific effort that was made.
- » When a young person makes a mistake trying to do something helpful, first use words to recognize that you knew of their good intentions.



Examples of Words of Affirmation

Praise for Accomplishments

- » Verbally praise for achievement or accomplishment. Be specific. Global praise doesn't work (ie 'Good Job Guys').
 - Graduating 4-H members
 - Grand Champion announcements
 - Snack stand customer service
 - Judging feedback
 - When youth are feeling down, share five reasons why you are proud of them
 - When youth make a mistake trying to do something helpful, first use words to recognize that you knew of their good intentions.
- » Affirmation for character. (kindness, honesty, tact)
 - 4-H club meetings and service events
 - Volunteering to set up for fair
- » Praise for personality.
 - A strong Junior Leader being a decision maker (you make things happen).
 - A livestock exhibitor who always has a positive demeanor.
 - A 4-Her who always makes sure other kids are being included.

Settings for Words of Affirmation:

- » Personal and one on one (in the presence of other caring adults)
- » Praise in front of others
 - Praise in smaller groups (ie. snack stand, club meeting, camping cabin)
 - Talk about a goal your teen would like to reach and verbally encourage them to explore it. This could work in a club meeting setting when setting personal goals for the year.
- » Written Affirmation
 - Letters of appreciation for 4-Hers who volunteer to help during achievement days
 - Graduation cards
- » Public Affirmation (large groups/audiences)
 - Recognition event, State Fair, 4-H camps and conferences

And “Remember ... ”

- » A child recaps the benefits of affirming words for a lifetime. Express appreciation for the very being of child, for those characteristics and abilities that are a part of the total package as a whole
- » Keep in mind that one aspect of feeling encouragement is to feel good physically
- » Are youth that we are working with receiving positive, supporting guidance?



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Quality Time

Show someone that they are valued by giving them your time.

Quality time is focused undivided attention. Quality time is a gift of presence to a youth. It conveys this message “You are important, I like being with you.” The key to quality time is found in the values and priorities you as an adult determine to cherish and implement.

Things to Consider:

- » Focus your energy and undivided attention to the young person
- » Avoid multitasking when spending time with youth. Distractions like texting, reading your phone, listening to music can pull away from the quality of time together.
- » Eye contact and body language are important!
- » Quality time does not require you to go somewhere special.



Examples of Quality Time

Shared Experiences

- » Join the events already happening! (i.e. go karting with junior leaders, bowling at a club's holiday party, helping with a community service project)
 - Involving teens in the planning of these events will show that you care about their interests
- » Sit with youth during meal times.
- » Offer to help youth with a specific 4-H project or skill.

Quality Conversations

- » Focus on the interests of the young person. Just because you are sitting in the same space, the child may not feel appreciated if you are not talking about things they find important.
- » Take interest in what's going on in their life:
 - Ask about: post high school plans, activities, interests outside of school and 4-H. Take time to encourage and praise youth for these plans/experiences.
- » Children never outgrow a need for quality conversation with adults. Learning how to communicate at this level will serve them well in their own future relationships. It will teach them how to build friendships and relate to work associates. It will show them how to process their own thoughts and to communicate in a positive, caring manner that respects the ideas of others. It will provide an example of how to disagree without being disagreeable.

Small Group Conversations

- » Working with advisory boards or junior leaders, active listening skills are important to hear the ideas of youth. Your role is not to teach or share your ideas with them.

And “Remember ... ”

- » Proximity does not equal quality time.
- » This can be the hardest language to speak because it requires a time commitment.



**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION**



Acts of Service

Doing something for another person that you know they would like you to do.

In many ways, this may seem like the easiest language to practice in 4-H. Much of what we do as caring adults is done with a “service” mindset. However, sometimes this service can be seen more as labor. Labor is usually from the outside and is done with reluctance. Appreciated service is an intentionally motivated desire to give one’s energy to others. The ultimate purpose of acts of service for 4-H youth is to help them emerge as mature adults who can give appreciation to others through acts of service.

Things to consider:

- » Make sure your own responsibilities are covered before offering to help others
- » Ask before you help, give a follow up offer if they say no right away
- » Don’t assume you know what help they want or need
- » Help by doing it their way
- » Serve voluntarily
- » Complete what you start
- » Acts of Service are taught. Children are naturally self-centered and cannot be expected to serve others with selfless motivation. We want to help them develop their own skills, follow their own interests, and become the best version of themselves.



Examples of Acts of Service

Teach a young person how to do something for themselves:

- » Project workshops
- » Community Service projects
- » Food stand/snack stand workers
- » Project judge helper
- » Assisting teens in planning their own leadership project – community service, project workshop, etc.
- » Assisting with sign-up and entry with 4-H Online and FairEntry

County Events:

- » Assist with animal preparation
- » Cleaning stalls
- » Loading/unloading of animals
- » Bringing in supplies during for Special Foods event
- » Practicing presentation or speech before event
- » Assisting with placing project in correct lot number (if incorrect)
- » Help set-up/tear down space

Other ideas:

- » Connect a teen with someone you know who can help them in an area of interest such as job shadowing, music lessons, etc.
- » Offer to be a reference or to write letters of recommendation for teens for job applications, scholarships, etc.

And “Remember ... ”

- » If you are asking the youth to complete a task or an act of service, you should be present and serving with them. Do not just stand to the side and “supervise”.
- » When adults and youth work together in such acts of service, the activity becomes a powerful lesson in the joys of helping others.



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Tangible Gifts

They see me, they were thinking about me.

The English word gift comes from the Greek work charis, which means “grace, or undeserved gift.” When talking about tangible gifts, we are not referring to ribbons or standard recognition such as years of membership recognition. These gifts should reflect that you are getting to know them and what that young person enjoys. The giving and receiving of gifts can be a powerful expression of appreciation, at the time they are given and often extending into later years.

Things to consider:

- » Give gifts to those who appreciate them.
 - Least valued appreciation language.
 - Much recognition focuses on rewards, when through that isn't what most individuals want to feel valued.
 - The grace of giving has little to do with the size and cost of the gift. It has everything to do with the thought behind it.
- » Gifts should be what an individual values.
 - Matching an ice cream gift card for youth to enjoy a sweet treat on a warm day. Providing a 4-H member with their favorite beverage to enjoy.
 - Keep a collection of inexpensive gifts or craft kits packed away for children. Then give them out as you sense their need.
 - Matching project area resources, tools, etc. To youth doing the project.
 - ▶ Example: matching a young person who cannot afford archery equipment with an individual willing to loan them the equipment needed in order to complete.
- » Be careful with gift giving, it can come across as a substitute for general appreciation. This can make children materialistic and manipulative, as they learn to manage people's feelings and behavior by improper use of gifts. Which can lead to tragic consequences for the children's character and integrity.

Examples of Tangible Gifts

Food

- » Take into account any food allergies and preferences.
- » Bringing donuts to a morning event/meeting, providing pizza for mid-day or evening activities.
- » Achievement Day Snack Stand bucks/coupons

Handwritten Notes

- » Handwritten notes with their t-shirts
- » Thank you notes for members, not just adults/volunteers during 4-H week

And “Remember....”

- » Gift-giving gone wrong can be perceived as a grooming behavior. Avoid this by giving gifts to a wide range of youth without any expectation of acknowledgement back.





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Appropriate Physical Touch

A powerful way of showing appreciation for certain individuals.

Physical touch is the easiest love language to use unconditionally, because adults need no special occasion or excuse to use it. However, when working with youth it is important to make sure that the physical touch is appropriate and that care is taken so touch is not misinterpreted as sexual or abusive. This may scare some adults from wanting to use physical touch at all with youth, but using common sense and being an active communicator while using appropriate physical touch can result in youth feeling appreciated and welcomed.

Things to consider before using appropriate physical touch to show appreciation:

- » Make sure to follow the rules and guidelines that are set forth by your organization
- » Make sure that your reasoning for touch is appropriate and that you aren't singling out certain kids. If you are only practicing physical touch with one gender or specific group of youth, you need to stop and re-evaluate your actions.
- » Be mindful of the reaction of youth to physical touch, if you put a hand on someone's shoulder and they tense up, they are not receiving it in a positive way.
- » Recipient is always the authority on what is appropriate touch.
- » Always practice appropriate physical touch in the company of other adults.



Examples of Appropriate Physical Touch

For younger youth

- » High fives/fist bumps when leaving the show ring
- » Handshakes when handing out awards/ribbons
- » Develop a unique handshake or greeting that is only used between the two of you
- » Pat on the shoulder/upper back
- » Hand on their shoulder when you give them verbal praise or a compliment
- » Side and A-Frame hugs (avoiding full frontal contact) when appropriate, ask for permission
- » Playing games or sports that require physical touch – arm wrestling
 - This allows touch that is meaningful without appearing forced.

For older youth

- » High fives/fist bumps when leaving the show ring
- » Handshakes when handing out awards/ribbons
- » Playing games or sports that require physical touch – arm wrestling
 - This allows touch that is meaningful without appearing forced.

And “Remember...”

- » Never force physical touch or demean a kid who doesn't want to participate. I.e. For example, don't say something like, “come on buddy, it's just a high five” if a 4-Her doesn't give you a high five while leaving the show ring.



Conclusion:

As adults working with young people, we serve as caring adult mentors that are crucial to the successful creation of positive youth development environments that allow youth to thrive and grow into successful adults. In 4-H, we keep in mind that experiences, relationships, and environments are all about the youth and you have a direct impact on how these experiences happen for youth.

Youth-adult partnerships are a key component to achieving the results that we see in 4-H. Ensuring youth know they are valued and encouraging them to bring assets to the table are so important when creating positive youth-adult partnerships. Acknowledging that each young person will receive and hear that appreciation differently. By diversifying the way we show appreciation to young people, doing so in a way that fills their tank instead of relying on “what we have always done,” we have the opportunity to help young people view themselves as prominent members of society with special talents and abilities.

The information covered in this document is not all encompassing! These are simplified definitions and examples to help you start moving towards exploring diversified ways to show appreciation to the young people we work with. The books by Gary Chapman, Ross Campbell, and Paul White provide more detailed accounts and ways to use these languages when working with young people.