



# Shooting Sports and Youth

## Leader's Guide

### Introduction

*Shooting is the second most popular international sport behind track and field. Moreover, about two-thirds of the homes in the United States have firearms in them. Exposure to the safe and responsible handling of firearms is vital to preventing accidents both at home and next door.*

*This is where the Penn State Cooperative Extension 4-H Shooting Sports Program can help. The 4-H Shooting Sports Program is designed as a positive youth development activity.*

*The shooting sports program teaches youth that being cool doesn't require senseless actions that put themselves and others in danger. Indeed, given the recent tragedies involving guns and schools, it is important to clearly state that this program is designed to promote the safe, responsible, and ethical use of firearms.*

### Goals of the Shooting Sports Program

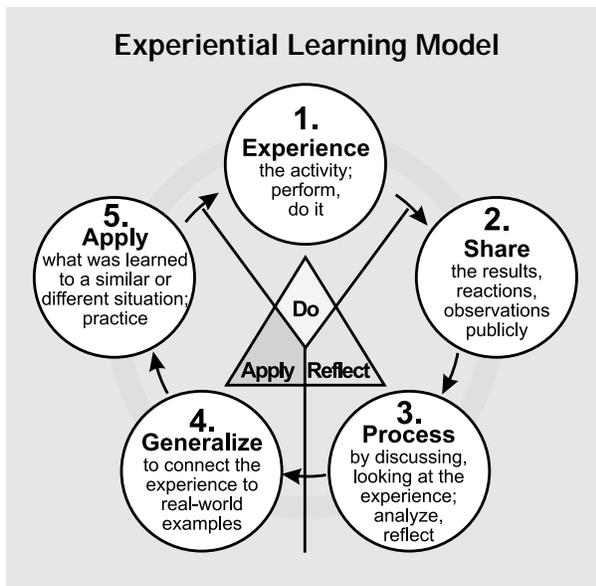
The specific goals and objectives of the 4-H Shooting Sports Program include, but are not limited to, those listed below:

- To teach safe and responsible use of firearms and archery equipment, including the safe handling and storage of firearms in the home.
- To foster sound decision making, self-discipline, and concentration related to safe and responsible use of firearms.
- To promote the highest standards of safety, sportsmanship, and ethical behavior.
- To enhance development of self-concept, character and personal growth through safe, educational, and socially acceptable involvement in shooting activity activities.
- To encourage participation in natural resources and related natural science programs by exposing participants to the content through shooting, hunting, and related activities.
- To expose participants to the broad array of vocational and lifelong avocational activities related to shooting sports.
- To strengthen families through participation in lifelong recreational activities.

### The Experiential Learning Process

Hands-on involvement (learning by doing) is the most effective teaching method for most 4-H projects, including the shooting sports projects. Youth develop a sense of worth when they do work for themselves. Learning by trial and error and practicing hands-on involvement helps young people become competent and capable in the skill they are practicing. As a leader, you can help the youth you work with feel that they are capable young people by helping them to learn experientially. The steps in the experiential learning

process encourage youth to try to do an activity and then process what they did. As the helper, you can talk with youth about what they are learning and how the learning can be applied to other areas of their lives.



## Life Skills

In addition to learning about gun safety and specific shooting sports skills, youth are learning important life skills that will help them in other aspects of their lives as they move into adulthood. The three life skills emphasized in shooting sports projects are responsibility, decision making, and goal setting.

### Responsibility

Youth with this skill are able to take care of themselves and be accountable for their behavior, obligations, and choices.

#### *Ideas for developing and practicing the life skill*

Give youth opportunities to prove that they are reliable and responsible. Talk about using good judgement while working on project activities. Continually emphasize the responsible use of firearms.

### Decision Making

Youth with this skill learn to recognize how personal values influence their own decisions and those of others, to develop an individual decision-making process, to set priorities, to make informed decisions, and to evaluate their own decisions.

#### *Ideas for developing and practicing the life skill*

Give youth experience in identifying their own values in analyzing the factors that influence decisions—identifying problems, gathering information, comparing and selecting from alternatives, judging and presenting reasons, debating and making real decisions, and anticipating on the results of actions that have significant consequences.

### Goal Setting

Youth with this skill are able to set benchmarks, monitor progress, and use feedback to achieve a targeted result.

#### *Ideas for developing and practicing the life skill*

Give youth experience in setting goals throughout the project. Keeping accurate records of their events and activities will allow them to monitor their progress. Give participants frequent and constructive feedback during their project work.

## Ages and Stages

Working with youth who are different ages can be a challenge. Understanding appropriate behavior for children at different developmental stages will help you plan appropriate activities and events that meet the needs of all youth in the your group. Youth learn and pass through developmental stages at different rates; however, all youth progress sequentially through the stages. The following information about how youth learn and appropriate activities for different developmental stages should be representative for most youth in the each category.

### Grades 3 to 5

Active is the word for the this group! Activities should encourage physical involvement, because 9- to 11-year-old boys and girls are anything but still and quiet.



Hands-on involvement with objects is helpful. Children at this age are still fairly concrete thinkers and will pay more attention if they are both seeing and doing things. They also need many opportunities to share their thoughts and reactions with others.

At this stage, children are just beginning to think logically and symbolically and are beginning to understand abstract ideas. As they consider an idea, they think it is either right or wrong, great or disgusting, fun or boring. There is little middle ground.

The role of the leader is critical at this stage. These children look to adults for approval and follow rules primarily out of respect for adults. Individual evaluation by adults is preferred over group competition, where only one can be the best. Comparing one child's performance with the success of another is difficult for children at this stage, and it erodes their self-confidence. Instead of comparing children with each other, build positive self-concepts by comparing each individual's present performance to their past performances.

This is also the age of the "joiners." Boys and girls like to be in organized groups of others similar to themselves. They generally are concerned with immediate self-reward. The satisfaction of completing a project often comes from pleasing the leader or parent rather than from the value of the activity itself.

Children between the ages of 9 and 11 have a strong need to feel accepted and worthwhile. School and other pressures are demanding. Success should continue to be emphasized. Youngsters want to know how much they have improved and what they should do to be better next time. Individual evaluation and encouragement from an adult can have remarkable results.

### **Grades 6 to 8**

Young teens at this developmental stage vary widely. Growth spurts beginning with adolescence occur at a wide range of ages, with girls usually maturing before boys. These rapid changes in physical appearance may make some teens uncomfortable. Faster-developing teens may feel thrust into a more adult

world. Slower-developing teens may be uneasy about their lack of changes.

Young teens move from concrete to more abstract thinking. Playing with ideas is as much fun as playing sports. Ready-made solutions from adults are often rejected by young teens in favor of finding their own solutions. Leaders who provide supervision without interference will do well with this age group.

Small groups provide the best opportunity for young teens to test ideas. Justice and equality become important issues. Opinions of peers become more important than those of parents or other adults. Teens enjoy the social interaction and acceptance they receive in groups.

As puberty approaches, young teens begin a roller-coaster ride of hormones and emotions. This time period seems to present the biggest challenge to a young person's self-concept. These youngsters face many changes. Young teens begin to test values and seek adults who are accepting and willing to talk about values and morals. Adults can help by providing self-discovery activities that lead young teens to self-knowledge.

Continue to avoid comparing young people with each other, and be careful not to embarrass them. They want to be a part of something important and have opportunities to develop responsibility.

### **Grades 9 to 12**

Most teens of this age know their own special abilities and talents. In most cases, they've already adjusted to the many post-puberty body changes. Mid-teens tend to be wrapped up in themselves and their peer group rather than family, teachers, and other adults. Relationship skills are usually more developed. Dating increases. Acceptance by members of the opposite sex is of higher importance.

Mid-teens begin to think about the future and make realistic plans. Their vocational goals influence the activities they select. Teens set goals based on their personal needs and priorities. As they master abstract thinking, they can imagine new things in ways that sometimes challenge adults.



These teens usually can initiate and carry out their own tasks without supervision. In your 4-H group, they can help younger members plan and complete their projects. They should be encouraged to take on this role. A leader can be helpful by arranging new experiences in areas of interest to teens, but must be sure to allow for plenty of input from them. The leader should play the role of adviser/coach for independent workers.

(Adapted with permission from *Electric Excitement*, 4-H CCS Electric Design Team)

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