4-H Youth Development Principles of Practice
Guiding Philosophy for 4-H Youth Development Professionals

1. 4-H Youth Development programs at all levels are conducted under the authority of NDSU Extension and the United State Department of Agriculture
   a. Local & County level 4-H Youth Development programs and 4-H Youth Development volunteers are accountable to the North Dakota State University Extension professionals responsible for 4-H Youth Development programs.
   b. 4-H Youth Development groups/clubs and volunteers operate under the guidance and control of Cooperative Extension.
   c. Use of the 4-H name and emblem is protected by law, and controlled by NDSU Extension.

2. 4-H Youth Development programs must comply with University and National 4-H policies, and state and federal law.

3. 4-H Youth Development’s principle outcome is positive youth development
   a. Programs should provide appropriate challenge and quest – while making safety a priority
   b. Everyone can succeed in 4-H – support should be available to promote success
   c. Young people should be encouraged to make their own decisions in 4-H Youth Development, both individually and collectively, and should be allowed to sometimes fail, within an environment of safety and support
   d. 4-H Youth Development is flexible enough to accommodate many different needs & interests
   e. 4-H Youth Development values academic achievement and problem prevention, but those are not the primary objectives of our programs.
   f. 4-H Youth Development values and encourages the involvement of parents with their children
   g. 4-H Youth Development delivers programs through a variety of methods and groups
   h. 4-H Youth Development provides a safe environment for both youth and adults. All persons (adults, youth, guests, spectators) will behave in a civil and respectful manner. The 4-H program reserves the right to ask persons who violate this principle to cease participation.

4. 4-H Youth Development programs are public
   a. Programs are intended to advance the public good
   b. Programs and activities are open to all
   c. Programs and activities should be visible to the public
   d. Program participation should not be limited to family activities
   e. 4-H Youth Development provides opportunities for youth to have experiences beyond their family, and to interact with caring adults who are not family

5. 4-H Youth Development respects and encourages youth voice
   a. Youth and adults work as partners
   b. Young people have rights
   c. Young people should be treated with dignity
   d. 4-H Youth Development provides opportunities for youth to have experiences, interactions and be motivated by positive peers
6. 4-H Youth Development **programs and groups are inclusive**
   a. Policies, practices, and images that limit participation must be avoided
   b. Programs and activities should promote a sense of "belonging" for all
   c. Participation is not based on ethnicity, race, gender or sexual orientation.
   d. 4-H Youth Development programs and activities should strive to always provide a welcoming and respectful environment
   e. 4-H Youth Development does not exclude children whose parents are not involved

7. **Serving** as a 4-H Youth Development volunteer *is a privilege, not a right.*
   a. Persons wishing to become or continue as a volunteer leader must comply with North Dakota 4-H Youth Development Volunteer Behavior Expectations
   b. NDSU Extension has the authority to decide whether or not a person is suitable to serve as a 4-H Youth Development volunteer
   c. NDSU Extension has the authority to discipline or remove volunteers

8. 4-H Youth Development programs for youth are **delivered primarily through volunteers**
   a. Paid staff develop and manage a system where volunteers work with youth
   b. Paid staff rarely lead or advise youth groups or clubs on a continuing basis
   c. New programs should be designed to be led by volunteers
   d. 4-H Youth Development provides volunteers with opportunities for personal growth and satisfaction

9. 4-H Youth Development programs are **non-formal, primarily offered during out-of-school time**
   a. 4-H Youth Development programs are voluntary, rather than compulsory; build skills through authentic hands-on learning, provides meaningful feedback without assigning grades.
   b. 4-H Youth Development partners with schools and compliments academics, but is not a substitute for them
   c. 4-H Youth Development employees are not classroom workers or school teachers but serve the community as youth development professionals

10. **Local decision making** within 4-H Youth Development is important and preferred
    a. Youth should be involved as valued resources in decisions affecting them
    b. Youth should have a meaningful voice on councils, boards and committees at the county, region, state and national levels of NDSU Extension
    c. Respectful, fair, and open decision making processes should be used
    d. NDSU Extension has ultimate responsibility and authority

**Sources:**
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