# Eight Essential Elements of 4-H

**(aka ‘The BIG-M’)**

No matter how you choose to volunteer, every 4-H volunteer is involved in positive youth development through these essential elements and concepts.

Concept: **Belonging** – young people don’t just join 4-H, they belong!

1. A positive relationship with a caring adult who acts as an advisor, guide and mentor. The adult helps set clear, supportive boundaries and expectations.
2. An inclusive environment is one that creates a sense of belonging and encourages members with positive and specific feedback. All members are celebrated, and everyone takes pride in their collective efforts.
3. A safe emotional and physical environment is part of the 4-H experience for youth, whether it’s the learning environment itself, other participants, adults or spectators.

Concept: **Independence** – young people have opportunities to choose and learn.

1. The opportunity to see oneself as an active participant in the future is to have hope and self-confidence in shaping life choices.
2. The opportunity for self-determination encourages critical thinking, personal responsibility and discipline.

Concept: **Generosity** – young people become active and engaged citizens.

1. The opportunity to value and practice service to others encourages connection, compassion, and the ability to approach problems as a member of an interconnected global society.

Concept: **Mastery** – young people master skills that are relevant.

1. Mastery, sometimes called self-efficacy, is the development of skills, knowledge, and attitudes with competent demonstration and use of each. Mastery is a process over time.
2. Engagement in learning involves self-reflection, building relationships and connections in order to develop understanding, and meaningful challenges.

Additional information on the Essential Elements is available online [nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource/Essential\_Elements.pdf](http://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource/Essential_Elements.pdf) as well as in the Appendices.