

Kansas youth between the ages of 10-19 make up 14% (402,705) of the total population in the state and in the nation. Most Kansas youth are healthy, are positively engaged with their families, schools and communities, and are on the path to becoming contributing and caring adults. However, there are areas of concern for Kansas youth:

- 19.9% of Kansas' ages 10-19 have had beer, liquor, wine in the past 30 days compared to 34.9% of youth in the United States.
- 22% of Kansas children between 6th and 12th grades report being bullied on school property when 19.6% of the nation's children report being bullied.
- 24% of Kansas teens have felt sad and hopeless for more than 2 weeks in a row, compared to 29.9% of the nation's teens.
- In 2013, 16.4% of Kansas teens considered attempting suicide – which is a 4.6% increase since 2011. A third of youth in the United States have considered suicide.

According to the national “Ready by 21” collaborative, employers report that many high school students lack the skills needed for work. Those skills include decision making, goal setting and leadership. Additionally, experts with Ready by 21 state that only four in ten young people are really doing well, which means that they are in school or working, and are healthy and connected to their community. These concerns were echoed in K-State Research and Extension's statewide survey in 2007 of 2,065 stakeholders who responded that it was very or somewhat important to help youth ages 10-19 years old “avoid harmful behavior” (89%) and “master positive life skills” (91%).

It is vital that Kansas youth are equipped with the knowledge, skills and behaviors necessary to lead productive and contributing lives. The United States Administration for Children and Families along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) agree that a **positive youth development** approach is necessary when helping young people thrive. Communities that promote positive youth development give youth opportunities to exercise leadership, build skills, and establish healthy relationships. Dr. Richard Lerner, Director of the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development at Tufts University, has determined that effective youth-serving programs have three “big” features: 1) Positive and sustained relationships between youth and adults, 2) Activities that build important life skills, and 3) Opportunities for youth to use these life skills as both participants in and as leaders of valued community activities. Programs and opportunities that focus on these “big three” elements foster five outcomes of positive youth development.

Most experts agree that positive development leads to young people having: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character (development) and Caring. The “5 Cs” are a guide for interacting positively with youth, and are benchmarks for designing effective programs that reach youth. The “5 Cs” was a focus of the national *4-H Study of Positive Youth Development*, which was a study of school-aged youth in the United States which began in 2002. A finding of the Tufts study was that a child or adolescent who develops each of the “5 Cs” is thriving.

Developmental scientists believe that these thriving youth develop a sixth “C” which is Contribution to self, family, community and civil society. In the 2013 report of the 4-H study, Lerner and his team determined that 4-H’ers were nearly four times more likely to make contributions to their communities than were other youth (Grades 7-12), and 4-Hers were about 2 times more likely to be civically active (Grades 8-12).

Give your child **the gift of 4-H** and watch them develop their “6 Cs” to make a difference in their lives and your community. Contact your local Extension office for information on how to “Join the Club”!

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“The Gift of 4-H”

“Chasing Clovers”

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