

## SESSION 3 - A Safe Emotional and Physical Environment



### Definition

Youth should not fear physical or emotional harm while participating in a 4-H experience whether from the learning environment itself or from adults, other participants, or spectators.

### Application

A safe environment seems self-explanatory. Safety is a very basic need. We want the physical environments where our programs take place to be safe. That is, they need to be free from danger and adequately equipped for the activities that will take place. Prior to any program, we want to consider the possible risks involved and eliminate or manage those risks. That's why we have lifeguards at camp waterfronts. This is also why many after-school programs have sign-in and sign-out procedures, and why others walk their participants home at night. It's also why we have medical releases and background checks.

Physical safety is not the only aspect to consider. We also want environments to be emotionally safe. That means that participants are not afraid that they will be made fun of, insulted, or threatened (adapted from Ferrari, 2003).

### Introduction to the Session

There are things we all recognize or have contact with that can be physically or, more important, emotionally dangerous. Often adults are aware and accommodate for physical dangers such as slippery floors, faulty equipment, horseplay or carelessness. Emotional dangers, however, are many times harder to identify, are often more damaging, and the effects can last a lifetime. Most youth are resilient enough to bounce back from minor set-backs or dangerous situations but ongoing exposure to unsafe emotional environments can contribute to a long-term lack of confidence and feelings of inadequate self-efficacy (a perception of the ability to influence one's future in a positive way). In this session, emotional safety is discussed in Activity 1, while Activity 2 looks at ways to be proactive in creating a safe environment.

This Element is present when:

- Youth groups do not tolerate bullying, cliques or put-downs.
- Adult leaders and volunteers are screened before they begin working with youth groups, and are continually trained in safety and child protection.
- Adults plan safety aspects and evaluation of risks (physical and emotional) into all meetings, camps, events, and trips.

Ways to support this Element:

- Train adults to be consistent in how they deal with misbehavior.
- Make sure all leaders, adults as well as youth, are trained in safety and risk management practices.
- Actively engage youth in planning, implementing and evaluating programs.
- Survey youth about ways to improve the group's environment.



## Goal of Lesson

To help adults working with youth identify the effects of unsafe environments and determine ways to minimize risks and the long-term effects of exposure to unsafe environments

## Objectives

Participants will:

- Recognize attributes of unsafe physical and emotional environments
- Identify strategies for minimizing physical or emotional risks

## Activities

Dominos for Davey

Creating Safety Zones

*“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.”*

—Nelson Mandela

## Materials Needed

- Several dominos (20 or more) per group
- Flat surface to work on (one per group)
- Chart paper and markers for each group
- Markers
- “Davey’s Story”
- Program Delivery Method Cards (Duplicate and cut apart.)





Time to complete lesson: Approximately one hour

## Activity One: Dominos for Davey

### Do the Activity

1. Assemble the participants in small groups of four to six members.
2. Give each group 20 dominos and a flat space in which to work.
3. Read “Davey’s Story” aloud.
4. Have the participants actively listen and stand a domino vertically on end each time a dangerous or potentially damaging situation presents itself. Have the dominos placed in a line about ½ inch apart.
5. When the story is finished, ask participants to give the first domino in the line a push and see what happens.

### Share

- What happened to your dominos? How is this “domino effect” similar to what could happen to Davey?

### Process

- How many times will Davey face negative situations before all of the dominos fall and it becomes too much for him to bear?

### Generalize

- Have the participants line their dominos up in a line again.

- Ask groups to think of positive things that could happen at the 4-H meeting to counterbalance the negative effects that Davey has experienced. As your group identifies each one, take a domino away.
- What has happened to the domino effect of negative influences in Davey’s life?

### Apply

- How did you feel when the story about Davey was read?
- In general, what were some of the negative influences in Davey’s concept of himself?
- Could those influences be present in other situations in his life?
- Rewrite Davey’s story to take place in a 4-H setting and focus on creating as many positive experiences as possible.

**Use the following story starter:** Davey had a rough week at school. In fact, he’s pretty sure no one likes or accepts him. He secretly hopes that when he gets up Saturday morning and goes to his 4-H meeting things will be better. Although he just started, it seems like it could be a cool and safe place to be. The leader even called him by name at the first meeting just two weeks ago. It’s finally Saturday morning and his parents drop him off at the club meeting...



## Activity Two: Creating Safety Zones

### Do the Activity

1. In the same small groups, provide chart paper and markers for each group.
2. Give each group one program delivery method card (community clubs, camps, school enrichment, after school, project clubs, events and activities, exchange trips, etc.).
3. Ask the group to consider and list physical dangers (such as unsafe grounds or buildings) and emotional hazards (such as older teens picking on younger youth) related to the delivery method assigned.

### Share

- What hazards did your group identify? Ask each group to share their listing.

### Process

- What are the most serious consequences of the emotional and physical dangers listed on your chart?

### Generalize

- What might the possible losses be for youth in our society should these negative emotional and physical dangers be left unchanged?

### Apply

- As small groups, consider how these dangers can be eliminated. Share with the large group as time allows.

### Customer Survey

Use the Target evaluation and/or the retrospective evaluation provided to evaluate this session.

### Essential Elements Program Checklist

Evaluate your program for evidence of the essential elements of successful, positive youth development programs by referring to the Essential Elements Program Checklist in the Appendix on p.103. Explore additional strategies for deliberate and intentional ways to incorporate the essential elements in the Web Appendix at: [www.4-h.org/resources/essential\\_elements](http://www.4-h.org/resources/essential_elements).

## Digging Deeper

### When Stress Piles Up

Coping with just one stress is challenging, but when multiple stressors impact a teen the cumulative effect can be devastating. However, managing multiple stressors can also build resilience. It's dependent on how people view their capacity to deal with stress and their access to resources that help them cope. Providing a safe environment where youth feel emotionally safe and where they can discover inner capacities can help them build the resilience necessary to manage multiple stressors. This resilience will serve youth well as they move through adolescence toward adulthood.

*Learn more about McCubbin and Patterson's work on "stress pile-ups" in the Web Appendix at: [www.4-h.org/resources/essentialelements](http://www.4-h.org/resources/essentialelements).*

### Bullying

Bullying is another example of a negative environmental attribute that can cause great emotional damage. Visit the following web site: [StopBullyingNow.com](http://StopBullyingNow.com) for information about bullying.

### The National 4-H Recognition Model

Youth have very different needs depending on their age, maturity and interests. Using the Recognition Model as a guide to program design contributes to creating an emotionally safe environment that acknowledges individual developmental needs, temperaments and preferences for recognition. The National 4-H Recognition Model highlights five ways to acknowledge youth involvement including participation, progress toward self-set goals, standards of excellence, peer competition and cooperation. Find out more about this model from your county extension resources and evaluate your program for evidence of the key components.

### References

- Baker, R., Harris, M., Larson, B., Martz, J. Stone, C. & Zieglofsky, S. (2007) *FUNDamentals of Youth Development* – Unit 2, 4-H Center for Youth Development - Montana State University.
- CSREES/USDA and National 4-H Council (1995). *Recognition in Youth Programs: Helping Young People Grow*.
- Ferrari, T. M. (2003). *The key ingredients* [Lesson plan]. (Available from Ohio 4-H Youth Development, 2201 Fred Taylor Dr., Columbus, OH 43210).



## Davey's Story

Davey was sleeping soundly when suddenly awakened by his brothers pounding on his blanket and shaking him. "Davey, you lazy bum! Get out of bed and downstairs before Dad has to come up here." Davey gets out of bed, rubs his eyes, and gets dressed. His mother sees him and tells him to go back and get another shirt because that one is all wrinkled and has a tear. "You just don't care how you look, do you?", his mother says. When Davey goes to brush his teeth, his older sister has locked the bathroom door. He asks how much longer it is going to be and she yells back, "What do you care—you're the baby in the family, remember?" He goes to breakfast but there is no toast and very little milk left to put on his cereal. Everyone else has already left the table. As he leaves for school, his mother calls out to him, "Davey, you've forgotten your lunch again. I don't know what I'm going to do with you! You'd forget your head if it wasn't attached."

As he gets to the corner, he sees his bus pull away and all the kids pointing and laughing at him. Davey has to walk to school and is late. He has to get a late slip from the office where he gets a lecture from the secretary about being more responsible. Davey walks into class late and remembers he forgot to do his homework. He thinks, "Oh, well, she doesn't expect me to hand it in anyway. She doesn't like me and didn't want me to be in her class in the first place." His teacher asks him to stay in at recess to finish his work while the others go outside to play baseball. He rushes through his lessons and hurries outside but the others have already chosen teams. Davey stands around for a while but nobody seems to notice him. Then, the PE teacher tells him to join a team. One of the boys yells, "Hey Davey, we got stuck with you last time, give the other team a sure OUT!"

Later that day, Davey gets his homework back with a low grade on it. The teacher puts a sad face on the paper and writes, "Your work is too sloppy and careless." When he gets home, he learns that he will not get the dog he wanted for his 4-H project. "You're just not responsible enough to take care of a dog, Davey," his dad says. Later that night, Davey goes to bed. He gets tears in his eyes as he thinks, "Nobody likes me or even wants me around. I might as well give up!" Yet he secretly hopes that when he gets up Saturday morning and goes to his 4-H meeting things will be better. Although he just started, it seems like it could be a cool and safe place to be. The leader even called him by name at the first meeting just two weeks ago.



(Duplicate and cut apart)

**COMMUNITY CLUBS**

**PROJECT CLUBS**

**AFTER-SCHOOL  
PROGRAMS**

**SCHOOL ENRICHMENT**

**CAMPS**

**EVENTS & ACTIVITIES**

**EXCHANGE TRIPS**



SESSION 3—EVALUATION  
—A SAFE EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

## About Your TRAINING Experiences . . .

We are interested in how you view your experiences with the Training on Essential Elements- Key Ingredients. Please circle the answer that best describes how much you agree with the following statements both AFTER and BEFORE the training.

AFTER THE TRAINING						BEFORE THE TRAINING				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
SD	D	N	A	SA	I can define what safe emotional and physical environments look like.	SD	D	N	A	SA
SD	D	N	A	SA	I can list various elements that create a safe emotional or physical environment.	SD	D	N	A	SA
SD	D	N	A	SA	I can explain to other volunteers/staff the importance of understanding safe emotional and physical environments.	SD	D	N	A	SA
SD	D	N	A	SA	I can evaluate safe versus non-safe environments in youth-adult programs.	SD	D	N	A	SA
SD	D	N	A	SA	I can implement activities to further the understanding of safe emotional and physical environments.	SD	D	N	A	SA
SD	D	N	A	SA	I can recognize emotional and physical safety issues in a youth development program.	SD	D	N	A	SA